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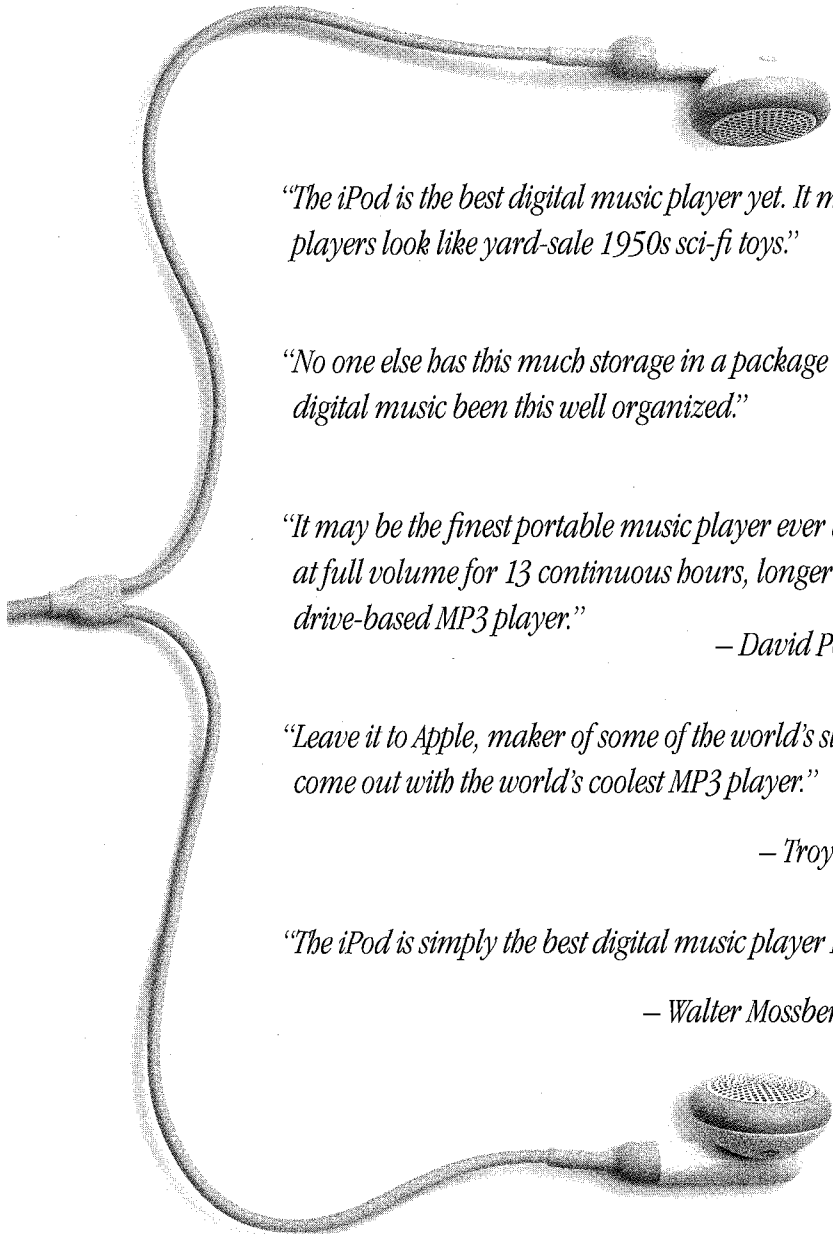




Actual size.

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— David Pogue, The New York Times

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— Troy Dreier, pcmagazine.com

"The iPod is simply the best digital music player I've seen."

— Walter Mossberg, The Wall Street Journal



THE NEW YORKER FICTION ISSUE

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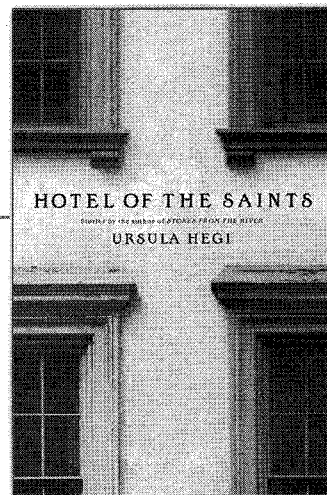
"202 pages, 110 smiles, 50 chuckles, 42 guffaws. What a deal, (Pinkwater is nuts)." —Tom and Ray Magliozzi, Hosts of NPR's *Car Talk*

Hotel of the Saints

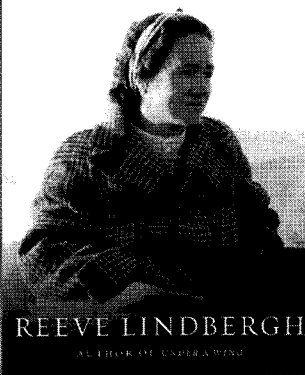
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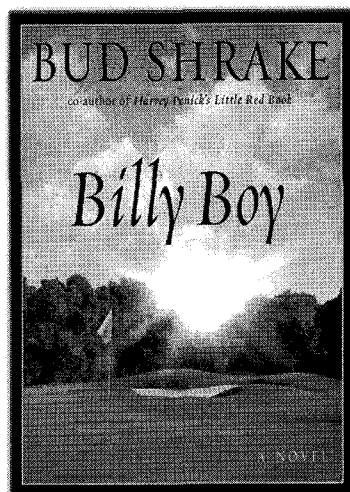
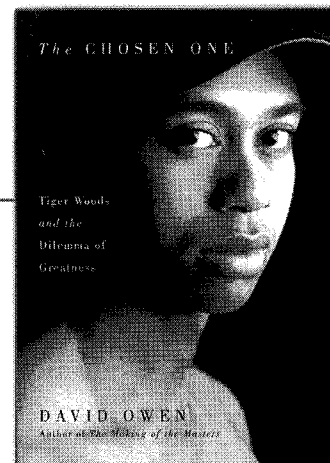
The Chosen One

David Owen

A thoughtful, incisive, elegant, and provocative look at the phenomenon of Tiger Woods, including the social, economic and athletic implications of this amazing young man, in a book that will stand among the classic works of sports philosophy.

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From the co-author of *Harvey Penick's Little Red Book* comes a charming coming-of-age novel that combines true-to-life golf, legendary figures of the past, and a story thick with the Texas dust.

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Earl Swagger returns in a thrilling, high-velocity story of good against evil, a stunning follow-up to Stephen Hunter's *New York Times* bestselling novel, *Hot Springs*.

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— *The Washington Post*



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we are."

—Sven Birkerts, *The New York Observer*

"Triumphant."

—David Kipen, *San Francisco Chronicle*



CONTRIBUTORS

Stephen King (Fiction, p. 76) has a short-story collection, "Everything's Eventual," coming out in the spring.

Valerie Steiker ("Dressing for Dinner," p. 64) is a senior editor at *Vogue*. Her first book, "The Leopard Hat," a memoir, will be published in May.

Amy Tan (Memory, p. 82) is a contributor to the anthology "The Right Words at the Right Time," which will be published next year.

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Mavis Gallant (Memory, p. 102) has been a contributor since 1950. More than a hundred of her short stories have appeared in the magazine.

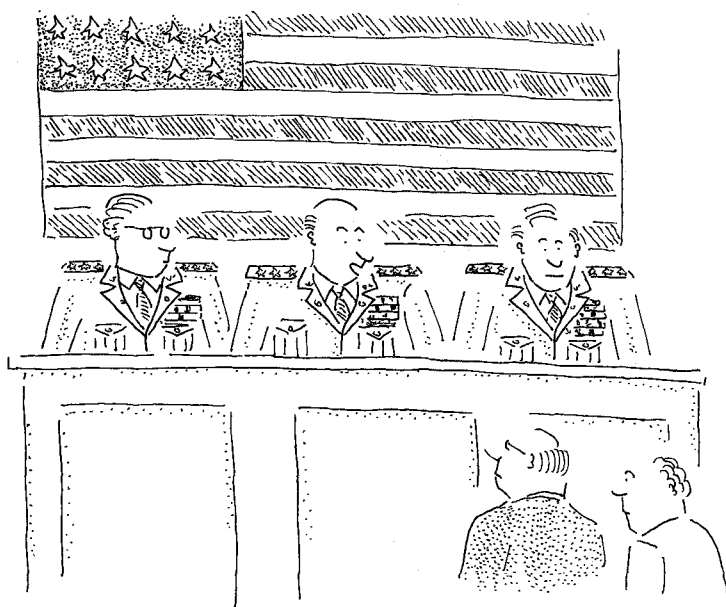
Jon Lee Anderson ("City of Dreams," p. 50) is a staff writer. He has been reporting on Afghanistan since September.

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Ben Rice (Fiction, p. 98) published a novella, "Pobby and Dingan," last year.

John Updike (Books, p. 118) is the author of fifty-three books, including, most recently, "Licks of Love" and "Americana and Other Poems." ♦



MANKOFF

"Another outburst like that, counsellor, and I'll order suppressing fire."

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GOOD NIGHT, SLEEP

New drugs like modafinil may, as Jerome Groopman writes, have the potential to do away with sleepiness, and perhaps sleep itself ("Eyes Wide Open," December 3rd). But the pioneering sleep studies done by William Dement in the nineteen-fifties and sixties (when I was a sleep researcher) should still give us pause. One of Dement's subjects, a disk jockey raising money for the March of Dimes, stayed awake for eight days and eight hours in January, 1959. Dement found that when the d.j. finally slept, at the end of the marathon, the REM period, when dreaming occurs, was one of the longest that he had ever seen. Later, in his famous dream-deprivation experiment, Dement would awaken his subjects as soon as the EEG indicated that they were in a REM period, which usually begins about sixty to ninety minutes after the onset of sleep. As the experiment progressed, however, the subjects would go into REM earlier and earlier, as if they were changing their sleep patterns to fit in the dreams, until, by the end, REM began as soon as they fell asleep. In other words, you could not keep a subject from dreaming unless you kept him from sleeping entirely. REM plays a crucial role in the sleep cycle; until we fully understand it, we should be wary of banishing sleep.

Judith Antrobus
New York City

BAD DIAPERS

Malcolm Gladwell's article on the new technology of disposable diapers, which poses them as a sort of modern miracle product, ignores another side of the debate ("Smaller," November 26th). Each year, we Americans dump eighteen billion disposables in landfills, where they enjoy an unbiodegraded stay of up to five hundred years. We consume a quarter of a million trees and 3.4 billion gallons of oil annually to make disposables. As far as comfort is concerned, rates of diaper rash have actually gone up in the decades since they were introduced, and other questions have been raised about

their effects on children's health. Gladwell laments the fact that the two men who perfected the disposable diaper were never celebrated. The real shame is that we as a nation do not take responsibility for our egregious consumption of the world's resources.

Anne Wile-Lasker
Marina del Rey, Calif.

It's one thing to use acrylic-acid polymers to line the Chunnel, and another to have them pressed against a newborn's skin. Manufactured with dioxins and filled with perfumes, modern diapers have an unfortunate tendency to leak the gel that Gladwell finds so impressive. But cloth diapers, and the drudgery they impose, are not the only alternative. There are still disposables made the old-fashioned way, with cellulose—a reasonable compromise between convenience and nature.

Florence S. Williams
Helena, Mont.

STANDARD DEVIATIONS

In his article on H. W. Fowler, Louis Menand mentions the contribution that Fowler's "Dictionary of Modern English Usage" has made to a standard for English, which Menand describes as "the democratic trend" (Books, November 26th). The idea that standardization is democratization is questionable, and standardization of English, judging from the media, isn't much of a trend in this country anyway, despite the efforts of well-intentioned educators. That's because dialects do something more than reveal class status; they also signal and reinforce group identity. Like it or not, in a diverse country English will have varieties. Democracy means accepting that, and not judging people by how they sound.

Thomas Stoffer
Paris, Mich.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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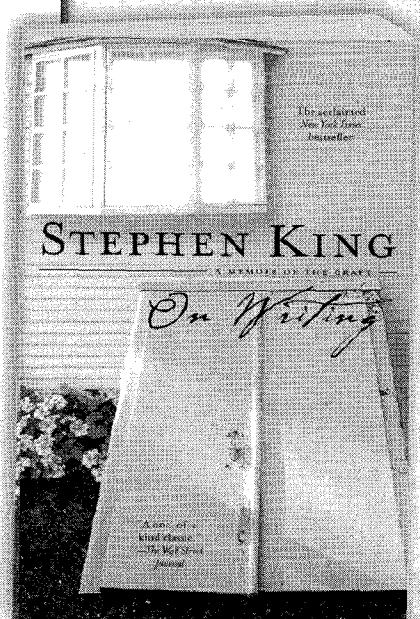
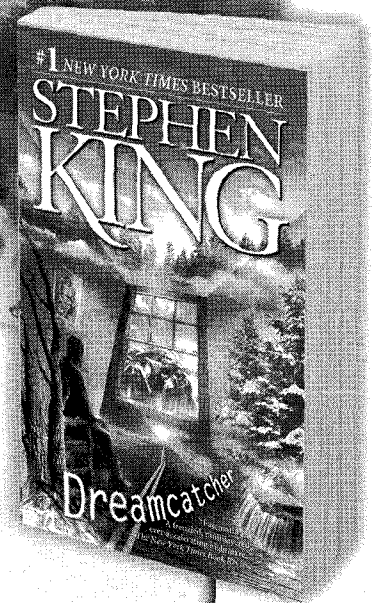
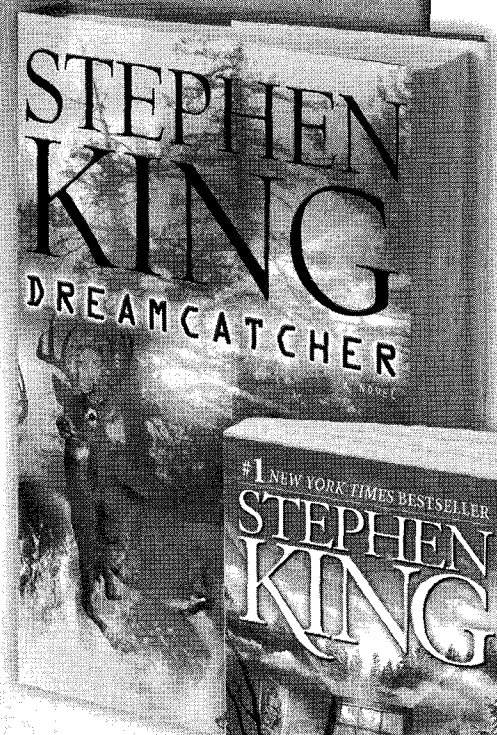
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The New York Times



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—Mameve Medwed,
Newsday

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



THE THEATRE OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

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BRUTAL IMAGINATION

The playwright Cornelius Eady and the composer Diedre Murray's latest collaboration concerns the notorious case of Susan Smith, who in order to cover her own crime of murder claimed an unknown black man had abducted her children. In previews. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303.)

HOBSON'S CHOICE

An Atlantic Theatre Company revival of Harold Brighouse's 1915 play, starring David Aaron Baker, Brian Murray, and Martha Plimpton. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

A MAMMAL'S NOTEBOOK:

THE ERIK SATIE CABARET

The latest show by the troupe Great Small Works, about the life and work of the French modernist composer, features the pianist Margaret Leng Tan and incorporates puppetry, dance, shadow theatre, masks, and film, as well as a staging of Satie's miniature opera for marionettes, "Geneviève de Brabant." Dec. 20-22 and Dec. 27-29 at 7:30 and Dec. 23 and Dec. 30 at 2:30 and 7:30. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

MARIA DEL BOSCO

(SEX & RACING CARS: A SOUND OPERA)

The avant-garde playwright Richard Foreman's fiftieth play. In previews. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

MOSTLY SONDHEIM

In her one-woman show, Barbara Cook performs the songs of Stephen Sondheim, as well as songs by his favorite composers. Previews begin Dec. 30. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AND GOD CREATED GREAT WHALES

In this encore production, the quintuple threat Rinde Eckert (writer, composer, actor, singer, dancer), looking like a demented genius harnessed to a tape recorder, plays a composer who is desperate to finish his opera, based on "Moby-Dick," before his memory gives out. The composer and his muse (Nora Cole), who wears a red whalebone corset and turns out to be a bit of a siren, act out scenes from the work, which promises to be fine and harrowing—Queequeg's song, hornpipes, Ahab's entrance. Inevitably, though, it runs adrift, as if the composer had embarked on one of

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Melville's grand digressions and lost the thread. (45 Bleecker Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 253-9983.)

BY JEEVES

A lame amusement by Alan Ayckbourn and Andrew Lloyd Webber, in which P. G. Wodehouse's shambolic Bertie Wooster (John Scherer) and his ingenious, haughty factotum, Jeeves (well played by Martin Jarvis), take the stage. Lloyd Webber's melodies are generic, and Ayckbourn, who, as the director, works manfully to whip a little fun into this listless tale, is less persuasive as a lyricist. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/12/01.) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200. Closes Dec. 30.)

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)

Three actors perform thirty-seven plays and a hundred and fifty-four sonnets in under two hours. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

DANCE OF DEATH

Helen Mirren and Ian McKellen square off in Strindberg's depiction of the blasted heath of matrimony, and they do battle magnificently. Mirren, playing a former actress (if there is such a thing as a former actress), is droll and wicked, and McKellen, in his deep embrace of the role of an army captain who comes face to face with his own mortality, is a life force. Directed by Sean Mathias. (10/22/01) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 13.)

DRUMMER WANTED

In Richard Maxwell's latest play, a loner and percussionist ponders personal-injury law after he is hit by a car. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5933. Closes Dec. 23.)

THE 8: REINDEER MONOLOGUES

A brisk, funny reminder that the tradition of venerating a man who keeps tabs on your children all year long and sneaks into your house at night to visit them is more than a little odd. Adobe Theatre Company's new production of Jeff Goode's series of interlinked monologues, directed by Jeremy Dobrish, smartly skewers an assortment of political and social hypocrisies as the reindeer dish the dirt on Santa. Not for small children. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200. Closes Dec. 22.)

ELAINE STRITCH AT LIBERTY

In her extraordinary one-woman show (co-created with *The New Yorker's* theatre critic John Lahr), the Broadway star once and for all confirms her

status as a living legend as she sings songs and tells tales about the ups and downs of her long life in the theatre (her first break, as Ethel Merman's understudy in "Call Me Madam," her iconic turn in Stephen Sondheim's "Company," her struggles with booze and with love). But terrific songs, hilarious gossip, and intimate confessions aside, Stritch, with her inimitable voice and uncanny timing, ends up capturing more than a single lifetime. Instead her show is the synthesis of so much that is rich and rewarding and heartbreaking about life on the stage. George Wolfe is the director. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Dec. 30.)

EVERETT BEEKIN

Richard Greenberg's play enacts one family's journey from the gritty sidewalks of the Lower East Side in the nineteen-forties to the bland promised land of California in the nineties. Along the way, much is lost, and Greenberg is articulate in evoking a melancholy that goes beyond words, as he was in his masterly "Three Days of Rain" a few years ago. But this time the work doesn't cut as deep—it's a portrait of devastation done in pastels instead of oils. Directed by Evan Yionoulis. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 6.)

45 SECONDS FROM BROADWAY

Neil Simon is in his element in his new comedy, which is part love letter, part elegy to a Broadway that ain't what it used to be. It's set in the legendary coffee shop of the Edison Hotel, in the heart of the theatre district, and while Simon has the dynamics of the place right the humor here is superficial and stale—it's canned chicken soup whose expiration date has long passed. (11/26/01) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

GOOD THING

The New Group presents a drama by Jessica Goldberg, in which a young woman's attempt to recapture her past jeopardizes the lives of two couples. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

THE GUYS

Bill Murray and Sigourney Weaver star in a workshop performance of a drama by Anne Nelson, in which a fire captain and an editor struggle to construct eulogies for firemen killed in the World Trade Center attacks. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407. Closes Dec. 20.)

HEDDA GABLER

This "Hedda," starring Kate Burton, is all surface brightness—it twinkles rather than burns. Jon Robin Baitz's colloquial adaptation of Ibsen's drama leaves little room for shading or depth, and the entire cast suffers under Nicholas Martin's heavy-handed and misguided direction, as does the audience. (10/22/01) (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

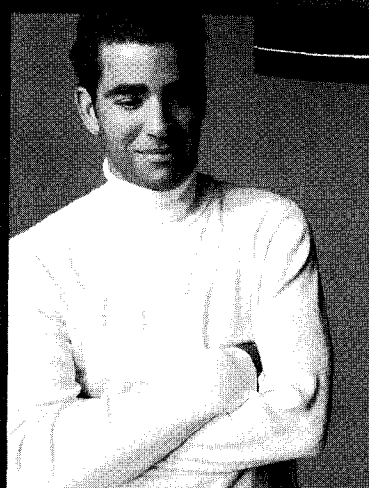
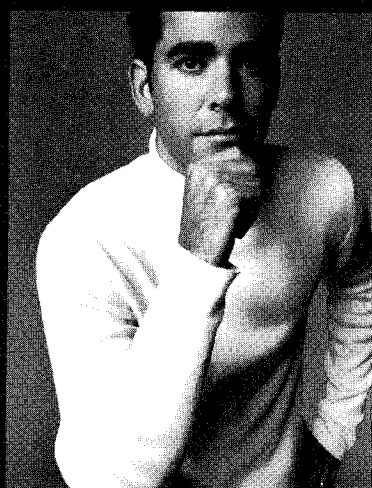
LAURENT CULUFFO

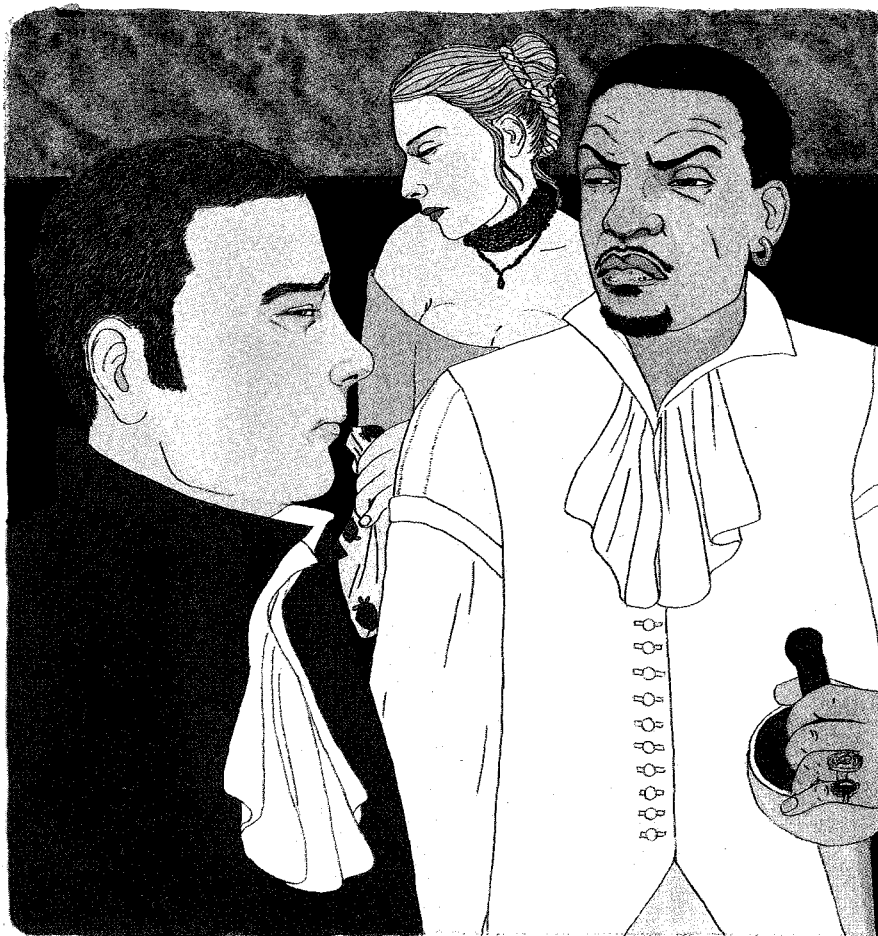
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Liev Schreiber, Kate Forbes, and Keith David, in "Othello."

HOMEBOY/KABUL

Tony Kushner's latest play, set in London and in Kabul in 1998, about a woman who becomes obsessed with Afghanistan. Declan Donnellan is the director. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

KIKI & HERB: THERE'S A STRANGER IN THE MANGER!

Just in time for the holidays, a fresh dose of cabaret satire from the duo otherwise known as Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 307-4100. Closes Dec. 31.)

LISTEN HOUDINI

This new play, conceived and written by the Axis Company, dramatizes the lengthy debate carried on in 1926 by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who fervently believed in spiritualism, and Harry Houdini, a determined skeptic. Thanks to a subtle performance by B. Barnhart, as a psychic, the show, directed by Randy Sharp, convincingly blurs the line between psychics as scammers and as true mystics. The arguments aren't new, but seeing them from Houdini's point of view—as a man used to mystifying others solely through his own efforts—brings them to fresh life. (1 Sheridan Sq. 807-9300. Closes Dec. 22.)

LITTLE HAM

This new musical, based on Langston Hughes's play of the same name, is a delightfully charming, old-fashioned entertainment. No weary postmodern angst, no gloomy, dissonant music—just a talented cast singing and dancing their way through a classic story in which the little guys band together, beat the Mob at their own game, and find true love. Set in 1935 in Harlem, it has the spirit of Depression-era comedies and is just as much fun. Carmen Ruby Floyd, whose voice particularly stands out; Jerry Gallagher, as a Mob tough who does no more than grunt; and Joe Wilson, Jr., as a gay couturier dreaming of Paris, turn these stereotypes into very funny, real characters. Directed by Eric Riley with a sure eye for detail, and with a ter-

rific onstage band under the direction of David Alan Bunn. With music by Judd Woldin, lyrics by Richard Engquist and Mr. Woldin, and a book by Dan Owens. (Hudson Guild Theatre, 441 W. 26th St. 206-1515. Closes Dec. 30.)

MAMMA MIA!

This smorgasbord of song, the brainchild of Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, the male half of the seventies supergroup ABBA, is nothing but hokum—a chucklehead pleasure. Andersson and Ulvaeus have shrewdly allowed their platinum hits to be sent up by Catherine Johnson's book, which is simply a slick cartoon that connects the dots between the band's No. 1 singles. (11/5/01) (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 563-5544.)

MARC SALEM'S MIND GAMES, TOO

Save the cash you were planning to spend on that psychic and instead purchase ninety minutes with the "mental and mind artist" Marc Salem, who claims that his highly entertaining act is both hocus-pocusless (anyone can do it, he claims—if they study the human mind for thirty years) and scamless (he offers \$100,000 to anyone who discovers a wire). He'll make no promises about your future; the fun comes from the fact that his fascinating "tricks" seem like magic and from trying to figure out how in the world he does them. At times you feel like you're the only person in the audience who isn't a plant. (Duke Theatre, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

METAMORPHOSES

Ovid said, "All things change, nothing perishes," and Mary Zimmerman's fluid and beautiful interpretation of several legends from his fifteen-book history of the world is reassuring proof. Her modern staging, which charmingly and wittily incorporates colloquial language and costumes that range across time, confirms the enduring and elemental power of myth. Here, real love, thwarted, begets love in other forms; kindness is rewarded in unexpected ways; and evil often backfires. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422. Closes Dec. 30.)

NOISES OFF

Jeremy Sams's revival of Michael Frayn's 1982 backstage comedy, a farce within an antic farce, is blissful fun. As the dysfunctional troupe of the travelling show "Nothing On," all the members of the excellent cast shine in roles that lesser comedians would surely find daunting. Frayn's construction requires spot-on comic timing, and with the help of Sams this production delivers it—and then some. The laughs rumble through the audience from start to finish. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

OTHELLO

Keith David has the title role and Liev Schreiber is Iago in the Public Theatre's staging of Shakespeare's tragedy. Doug Hughes is the director. (425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Dec. 30.)

PUPPETRY OF THE PENIS

It's one thing for a man to develop the ability to stretch his scrotum until it's the size of a dinner plate, but another to share this talent with the world. These two Australians, Simon Morley and David (Friendly) Friend, profess embarrassment at the success of their "little pub show," but it's still a con: fifteen minutes into their act they are utterly naked and out of ideas. They can't go on, but they do. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

PSYCH

In Evan Smith's new comedy, a psychology grad student who moonlights as a dominatrix is seized by paranoia. Staged by Playwrights Horizons. (Signature Theatre, 555 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

ROADSIDE

From the York Theatre Company, Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt's new musical, set in a travelling tent show in the Old West. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820.)

SEXAHOLIX . . . A LOVE STORY

John Leguizamo's new solo show. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE SHAPE OF THINGS

Gretchen Mol, Paul Rudd, Rachel Weisz, and Frederick Weller are in the cast of the Almeida Theatre Company staging of Neil LaBute's latest play. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

[SIC]

Three struggling downtown twentysomethings (Dominic Fumusa, Christina Kirk, and James Urbaniak) live on the same floor in cubicles trying to pass as apartments, where they sidle around each other emotionally as well as physically. The thirty-six-year-old playwright Melissa James Gibson gives them a steady, if disjointed torrent of clever things to say, with a lot of self-consciously odd rhythmic pauses built in. But Pinter it's not. When the characters stop their noisy self-absorption long enough to eavesdrop on the troubled couple in the large apartment below (an intriguing bit of stage design by Louisa Thompson), it turns out there's a better play going on down there. Directed by Daniel Aukin, the acting is good, especially by Urbaniak, whose wry projection wrings the most out of his lines. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 206-1515.)

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

In the terrifically engaging opening scene of Andrew Bovell's play, in which four characters are talking almost simultaneously, no one is possessed and no one is blathering. They are all, however, on the verge of cheating on their spouses. Mark Clements has directed Bovell's fugue-like script with wit and command, so everyone, the audience included, gets the sincere, if desperate, attempt to communicate. After the flashy opening, the playwright's motifs of loneliness, betrayal, and need complicate, interweave, and deepen. Characters only speculated about in Act I become flesh in Act II, others are introduced, one reappears. The players—Karen Allen, Kevin Anderson, Margaret Colin, and Michel R. Gill—have the chops to pull off all nine parts impressively, so every scene delivers an unexpected wrinkle, an unfolding surprise. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

THE STREETS OF NEW YORK

Charlotte Moore's musical adaptation of the nineteenth-century Irish playwright Dion Boucicault's drama. (Irish Rep, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

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SUMMER OF '42

A musical adaptation of the 1971 movie, which was based on Herman Raucher's coming-of-age novel of the same title. With a book by Hunter Foster and music and lyrics by David Kirshenbaum. Gabriel Barre is the director and choreographer. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

THOU SHALT NOT

The psychological thriller "Thérèse Raquin" was Émile Zola's first experiment in naturalism; this ambitious musical retelling of the novel is an experiment in Expressionism. The director, Susan

TABLES FOR TWO



CASTELLANO

138 W. 55th St. (664-1975)—The presiding figure in this midtown old-timer is the hooker in the famous Brassai photograph "Prostitute Playing Russian Billiards," who coolly assesses the spare, brightly lit room from her place amid the restaurant's trove of vintage prints by the French Master. Like many European establishments favored by opera-, ballet-, and concertgoers, Castellano—which attracts many of its patrons from City Center, across the street, and Carnegie Hall, a few blocks away—is devoted to serious eating without fuss. Waiters with smoke-weathered faces and droopy black ties recite specialties of the day as though remarking on the weather. A dessert trolley is wheeled up on the off chance that someone is feeling nostalgic for blueberries and cream. The hand in the kitchen is so practiced that the most familiar dishes seem freshly satisfying. Among the best choices on a menu that ranges knowingly across the northern regions of Italy are a petal-like beef carpaccio with a mustard-mayonnaise sauce from Harry's Bar; a feather-light spinach and egg-drop soup *alla romana*; homemade black tagliatelle with cuttlefish; swordfish sautéed in a soft tangle of leeks; and crusty, charred slices of sirloin, accompanied by a dipping sauce of anchovy and herbs. For many regulars, the *specialità della casa* is the humblest one—a side order of spinach sautéed in garlic and oil to such silky perfection that one can imagine Brassai's demimondaine saying, "You see? This is how it's done." (Open daily for dinner, weekdays for lunch and dinner. Entrées \$17-\$30.)

—Charles Michener

Stroman, wants dance to be the narrative engine of the musical, but it seems inadequate to the brooding psychology of Zola's lovers, Laurent (the strapping and charismatic Craig Bierko) and Thérèse (Kate Levering). What Zola imagined as the heart's wilderness Stroman and her team re-create as a theme park of self-destruction. (11/5/01) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 6.)

UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL

This one-man show, written by Glen Berger and performed by T. Ryder Smith, manages to be both a funny tale of a Dutch librarian's midlife crisis and a serious, intriguing look at the value of any one life. After a book is returned to the library a hundred and thirteen years overdue, the librarian becomes obsessed with finding out how and why. He eventually comes to believe that the Wandering Jew was the errant borrower, whose late return of the volume is one of a series of clues he's left in a desperate attempt to document his existence. As billed, it's "An Impressive Presentation of Lovely Evidences." Directed by Randy White. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

URINETOWN

The amount of fun to be had at this musical, by Greg Kotis (book and lyrics) and Mark Hollmann (music and lyrics), is in direct proportion to the unpleasantness of its title. Its central idea is that an evil corporation controls all the toilets in a city that bears some resemblance to New York, but the show is really no more and no less than a terrifically spirited sendup of musicals and their conventions, as self-conscious and gag-happy as a Warner Bros. cartoon (not only does a sign saying "Secret Hideout" hang above a secret hideout; the sign has an arrow on it). (10/1/01) (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE

John van Druten's 1943 romantic comedy about an actress and a soldier who have both sworn off love. (Mint Theatre, 311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231. Closes Dec. 30.)

WHERE'S MY MONEY?

A dark comedy by John Patrick Stanley, about two bush-league divorce lawyers from Brooklyn. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THE WOMEN

Scott Elliott directs a cast that includes Kristen Johnston, Rue McClanahan, Cynthia Nixon, Jennifer Tilly, Mary Louise Wilson, and Jennifer Coolidge, in Clare Boothe Luce's 1936 satire. With costumes by Isaac Mizrahi. (11/19/01) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300. Closes Jan. 13.)

WONDER OF THE WORLD

A farcical saga of a manic faux-naïve chatterbox, Cass (the fetching and excellent Sarah Jessica Parker), who goes to Niagara Falls in search of a new life after leaving her husband of seven years, Kip (Alan Tudyk). The playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's soi-disant wacky humor offers no revelations, no admissions, no questions, only startling juxtapositions. The show's one incidental delight is the touching Kevin Chamberlin, as Captain Mike, the Niagara tour-boat guide who falls for Cass. (11/12/01) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA

Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES

Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET

Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO

Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT

Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA

Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS

Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001:

A SPOOF ODYSSEY

Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.

THE FULL MONTY

Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.

KISS ME, KATE

Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. (Closes Dec. 30.)

THE LION KING

New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES

Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE MUSIC MAN

Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. (Closes Dec. 30.)

PERFECT CRIME

Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS

St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

PROOF

Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.

RENT

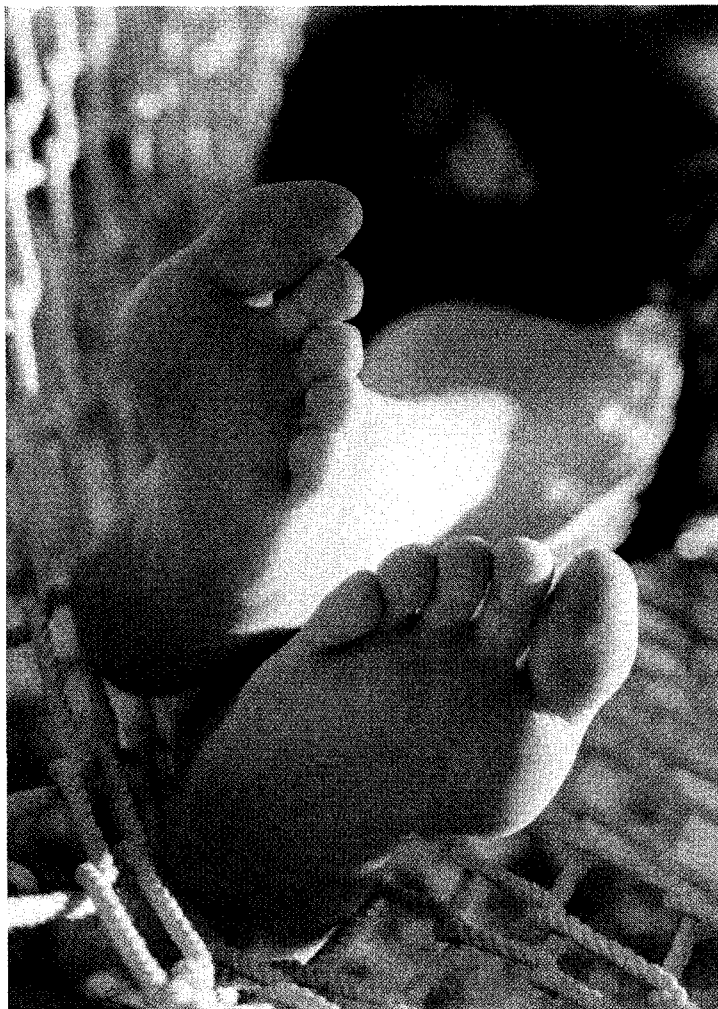
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.



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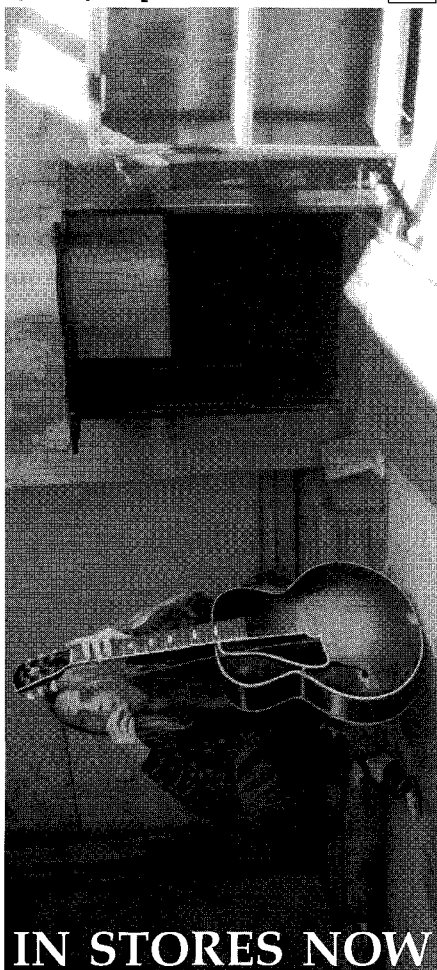
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Manhattan department-store windows are one thing. But there's something far more heartening about extravagant Christmas decorations designed by zealous homeowners, who shoulder outrageous Con Ed bills and navigate byzantine wiring diagrams, all the while standing to gain nothing but the attention of strangers (and perhaps the envy of neighbors). In New York City, holiday lights burn brightly in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights, and Bensonhurst, thanks in part to the predominance of Italian Catholic families, but in larger part to the fact that they live in actual houses, with actual lawns surrounded by actual fences.

A holiday pilgrimage might begin on the subway, specifically on the N, M, or W train to Gravesend, after which a quick transfer to a Narrows Avenue-bound No. 4 bus showcases the Christmas lights of Bensonhurst. The houses are built close to the road here, and the busses stop infrequently, so the ride becomes a pleasant blur of icicle lights, door wreaths, and the periodic lit plastic Santa or glowing Virgin Mary.

In a bakery on Eleventh Avenue in Dyker Heights seemingly run by teenage girls, they're not unaccustomed to light-watchers stopping for coffee and directions, but there is some disagreement about the best stretches of holiday cheer. A customer in the bakery, who wears a leather jacket and ogles the girl behind the counter, claims it's best along Eighty-fifth Street, where you can see past the houses to the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. "Wrong," the girl says, rolling her eyes. "He's from Sheepshead Bay. You want to go to Eighty-third between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues. That's where all the

cars are always stopped. That place is ballistic."

And it is. The glow emanates from one lot in particular, a two-story white house visible from either end of the block (and perhaps from space). From the corner, you notice large moving pieces of plastic, lit from within. Then you catch the strains of music, a small-world-after-all-type jingle piping out of concealed speakers. Then you see the Ferris wheel, populated by mechanical children from the nations of the world, singing in harmony with the other mechanical children stationed across the lawn, who not only sing but perform various acrobatic and terpsichorean feats. A huge lit globe rotates precariously in the background. And yes, there are many cars stopped to watch. Minivans, mostly. The windows are down, revealing the faces of children, lit up both from the lights and from glee. You half expect to see the Rockettes come filing down the sidewalk. The other homes on the block seem reserved by comparison: just a simple six-foot snowman at the top of the steps, or maybe a subtle wire menagerie of reindeer with a dozen luminous toy soldiers.

Then it's off to Thirteenth Avenue, where the Tasty Pastry bakery sits across from the Shrine Church of St. Bernadette. Lit wire angels in various poses populate the small gated yard at the church, where high on the wall a Virgin Mary statue stands encased in a grotto of cascading white plaster, complete with a votive-candle shrine. A couple of bucks can buy you a strong shot of espresso and a cannoli at Tasty Pastry, which also offers gingerbread houses at outer-borough prices if you want a souvenir for the ride home.

—Matt Dellinger

MATT MADDEN

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Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.

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Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIIST'S WIFE

Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.

TICK, TICK . . . BOOM!

Jane Street Theatre, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING

St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES

Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

Final performances of "The Nutcracker." The boys and girls at the Christmas party are full of Russian verve and pluck in Balanchine's version, and his candies, fairies, and flowers are fragrant with the bloom of romance. In "The Nutcracker," Tchaikovsky was at the peak of his powers as a fabulist, and Balanchine rose to meet him. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570. Dec. 18-20 and Dec. 27 at 6, Dec. 21-22 and Dec. 29 at 2 and 8, Dec. 23 and Dec. 30 at 1 and 5, Dec. 26 at 2 and 6, Dec. 28 at 8, and Dec. 31 at 7.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE

Dec. 19 at 8: "Here . . . Now," "Shelter," and "Serving Nia." ♦ Dec. 20 at 8: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Episodes," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 21 at 8: A medley of works by Alvin Ailey. ♦ Dec. 22 at 2: "Night Creature," "Cry," "Memoria," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 22 at 8: "The River," "Double Exposure," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 23 at 3: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Bad Blood," and "Grace." ♦ Dec. 23 at 7:30: "Phases," "The River," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 26 at 8: A medley of works by Alvin Ailey. ♦ Dec. 27 at 8: "Chocolate Sessions," "Sweet Bitter Love," "Shelter," and "Caravan." ♦ Dec. 28 at 8: "The River," "Dance at the Gym," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 29 at 2: "Dance at the Gym," "Shelter," and "Serving Nia." ♦ Dec. 29 at 8: "Grace," "Shelter," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 30 at 3: A medley of works by Alvin Ailey. ♦ Dec. 30 at 7:30: "Grace," "Double Exposure," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 31 at 8: "Caravan," "Here . . . Now," and "Revelations." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

BALLETT FRANKFURT

Final performances of the German company performing works by the American choreographer William Forsythe. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 18-20 at 7:30.)

BALLET TECH

The Joyce's co-founder Eliot Feld brings his company home for its winter season. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Dec. 18-21 and Dec. 26-27 at 7, Dec. 22-23 and Dec. 28-29 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 30 at 2.)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT/BAGNOLET PLATFORM

The biennial choreographic competition (winners get a world tour) screens local competitors. Two items of canned goods will get you in for half price. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Dec. 20-22 at 8:30.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATER

STUDIO COMPANY

"When I make a dance, I just go ahead and make a dance," the San Francisco Ballet dancer and choreographer Julia Adam says. This method has produced quirky ballets that seem to invent their own idiom. The starting point for "The Shroud," for example, is a bit of cloth, as translucent as tissue paper, that gets stuck to the foot of one member of a primitive, folk-dancing tribe. The cloth grows to the size of a shroud, the dancers break from their Stone Age circle and move into more intricate arrangements, and then—like Bruegel's Icarus falling, unnoticed—a death occurs. Stanton Welch's "The Long and Winding Road" and "Six to a Bunch," by the Juilliard-trained choreographer Jessica Lang, complete the program. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Dec. 18-19 at 8.)

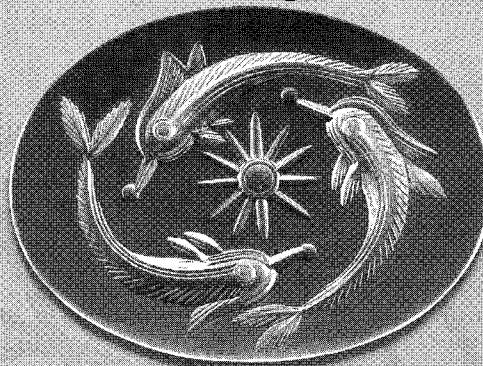


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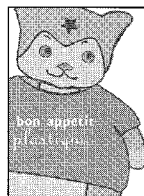
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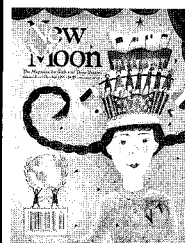
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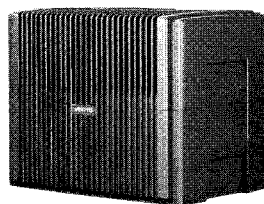
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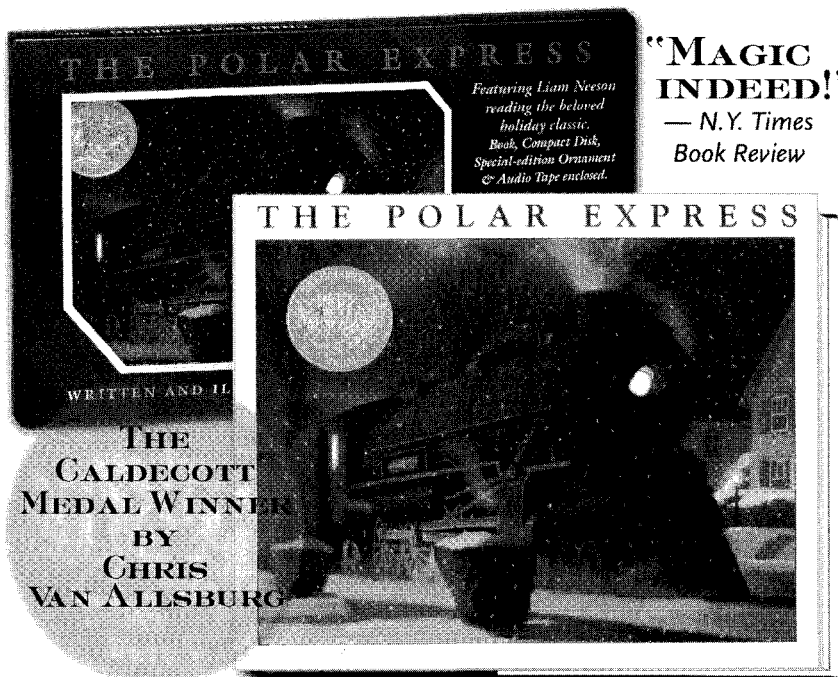
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— N.Y. Times
Book Review

**"DRAMA AND MAGIC THAT
CHILDREN WILL LOVE!"**

— Los Angeles Times Book Review

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"RETURN"

For the past five years, Julia Mandle has created thoughtfully costumed, multimedia performances in storefronts, in a concrete park over an ancient bog, and in other spots vulnerable to the weather or an audience coming and going as it pleases. For "Return," she has moved indoors. "I imagined cutting a channel through a building and having the performance there," she says, but the Gale Gates site—a long, narrow swath of a 40,000-square-foot warehouse—is, she admits, "a little more practical." The tunnel-like configuration helps her tell the story: when the protagonist, a veteran of the Second World War named Walter, shuffles toward a far wall to join his younger self (and a chorus of women in envelopelike dresses), it's as if we're looking through the wrong end of a telescope. "It seems fitting for an introspective piece," she says. (Gale Gates et al., 37 Main St., at Water St., Brooklyn. 718-522-4597. Dec. 18-22 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

"MERRY MAYHEM TOUR"

Three generations of grimacing, parent-worrying tomfoolery—the grandfatherly (and doddering) patriarch of metal, Ozzy Osbourne; the hirsute horror aficionado and ex-White Zombie ring-leader, Rob Zombie; and the freak-rock upstarts Mudvayne—do their discordant damndest to conjure a semblance of Hell for one and all. (Nassau Coliseum. 212-307-7171. Dec. 21 at 7. ♦ Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. 212-307-7171. Dec. 23 at 8.)

HELEN SCHNEIDER

The singing actress interprets standards by Gershwin, Ellington, and others, backed by the pianist Bob Kaye. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 21 at 8.)

DARLENE LOVE

The singer with the voice that was one of the birth cries of rock and roll (her Phil Spector-produced hits include "He's a Rebel" and "He's Sure the Boy I Love") and who's backed everyone from Sam Cooke and Elvis Presley to Cher, spreads a little seasonal cheer with a holiday show. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 307-7171. Dec. 21 at 8 and Dec. 22 at 7 and 9.)

GEORGE WINSTON

The New Age piano stylist offers a solo recital. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Dec. 22 at 8.)

THE STROKES / GUIDED BY VOICES

Though both celebrated bands can be seen as having betrayed their indie roots by embracing major labels, the Strokes are still the reluctant new saviors of rock, and Guided by Voices remain lo-fi kingpins. Guided by Voices may have been around much longer, but it's the local heroes the Strokes who'll fill this hallowed uptown hall with Lower East Side hepcats. (Apollo Theatre, 253 W. 125th St. 531-5305. Dec. 30 at 8 and Dec. 31 at 10:15.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Dec. 21: Jose Feliciano wishes you a *Feliz Navidad*. Dec. 22: The soul man **Sam Moore**. Dec. 29-31: The **Max Weinberg 7**, the house band for "Late Night with Conan O'Brien," closes out the year with a heavy dose of rockin' boogie and jump blues.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 20: A rare appearance by the enchanting home-town quartet **Angels of Light**. The band's leader Michael Gira has for twenty years pushed fiercely (sometimes violently) against lyrical and musical boundaries. In the early eighties he founded the legendary New York nihilists Swans and took that band on an un-

expected arc from primal songs with sadomasochistic overtones to lush and beautiful compositions featuring soaring strings and haunting melodies. The Angels of Light continue the journey, going ever deeper into a world of rich harmony. Its four members play a plethora of instruments, including the hammer dulcimer, piano, and auto-harp, all of which evoke the spirit of old-time country music from the Carter Family era. The lyrics, however, are unwavering—often dark and occasionally self-lacerating, they give the music a razorlike edge. Dec. 30-31: **Patti Smith** carries on her never-ending comeback (after recusing herself for a multi-year spell as a wife and mother). Now enjoying a second round in the limelight, Smith may lack the bohemian insouciance of her seventies heyday, but she has lost none of her fire.

BROWNIES

169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Dec. 21: The former D Generation front man **Jesse Malin** shares a bill with **Hot Socky**, an amusing new band led by the former Thin Lizard Dawn singer **Greg Lattimer**, and a local pop outfit called **2**.

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 27-28: A fifteen-year veteran of James Brown's legendary JBs and a pivotal member of the Parliament/Funkadelic empire, the tenor saxophonist **Maceo Parker** knows a thing or two about how to thrill. Dec. 31: The members of **Soulive** perform in dark suits that are as sharp as the group's Hammond-organ-driven retro jazz and funk. The trio is breaking away from its jam-band roots in a big way, with a debut on Blue Note records, "Doin' Something." With the pedal steel guitarist **Robert Randolph**.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 22-25: The **Jewsapalooza Festival** features more wonderfully warped klezmer and progressive Jewish music than you can shake a dreidel at.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 19: **Hem**, a sextet with a penchant for atypical instrumentation (guitar, mandolin, glockenspiel) and cloudy fairytale melodies. Dec. 21: **Drums and Tuba**, a highly infectious trio—tuba, drums, and guitar—which laces its loop-filled songs with New Orleans-style grooves and some progressive-rock guitar heroics.

NORTHSIX

66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Dec. 21: **The Silos**, the painter turned guitarist **Walter Salas-Humara's** musical collective, has evolved into a trio, and its repertoire has grown from back-country-tinged art pop to raucous garage rock and roll. Sharing the bill is **Syd Straw**, the gifted vocalist who first made her name with the Golden Palominos.

S.O.B.'S

204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Dec. 26-27: The master African drummer **Baba Olatunji** brings his inspired ensemble to town. Dec. 30: Pioneers of the American ska scene, New York City's **Toasters** sported porkpie hats and checkered duds back in the early eighties, before the more commercially successful **Mighty Mighty Bosstones** and **No Doubt** began their ascension to stardom. Two decades on, the band's self-described "East Side Beat" skanks ever onward.

VILLAGE UNDERGROUND

130 W. 3rd St. (777-7745)—Dec. 31: **Southern Culture on the Skids**, a group of psychobilly swamp rockers from Chapel Hill. With New Jersey's **Swingin' Neckbreakers**.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through Jan. 12: The vocalist **Andrea Marcovicci** pays tribute to **Gertrude Lawrence**, **Noel Coward's** theatrical better half. Dining.

ARCI'S PLACE

540 Park Ave. S, between 30th and 31st Sts. (532-4370)—Monday nights, including New Year's Eve, feature **Christine Ebersole**, who spends the rest of the week wowing them on Broadway in "42nd Street."

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Through Dec. 22: The salsa-pioneer pianist **Eddie Palmieri**. Dec. 27-29: One of the few truly individual post-Coltrane soprano saxophonists and a distinctive tenor player as well, **Dave Leibman** has recently been exploring the work of two wholly unique composers: Brazil's **Antonio Carlos Jobim** and Italy's **Puccini**. Dec. 31: **Lea DeLaria**, Broadway's favorite comic foil, also gives quite a turn as a feisty jazz-inflected singer. On her current album, "Play It Cool," she and a sharp jazz ensemble reveal the inner swing in theatrical material by the likes of **Sondheim**, **Kander and Ebb**, and **LaChiusa**. Dining.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Dec. 18-19: **Chick Corea** continues his monthlong sixtieth birthday party by performing duets with fellow-pianist **Gonzalo Rubalcaba**. His **New Trio**, an explosive unit featuring bassist **Avishai Cohen** and drummer **Jeff Ballard**, follows on Dec. 20-21. The **Three Quartets** band, celebrating the 1981 album of the same name, brings in the saxophonist **Michael Brecker**, the bassist **Eddie Gomez**, and the drummer **Steve Gadd** to wrap up the **Corea** event on Dec. 22-23. The ever-popular alto saxophonist and smooth-jazz legend **David Sanborn** takes over Dec. 26-31.

CARLYLE HOTEL

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The **Café Carlyle**, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through Dec. 31, the magisterially puckish **Bobby Short**. ♦ Across the hall, in **Bemelmans Bar**, **Barbara Carroll** is in attendance through Dec. 31.

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MOVIES

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IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through Dec. 23: The **Kenny Barron** trio. As consistent as he is ubiquitous, the pianist Barron turns each set into a lesson in unmannered, eloquent improvisation. Dec. 25-30: The piano giant **McCoy Tyner**, here in a trio setting, plays the music of his former employer, saxophonist John Coltrane. Mondays, including Dec. 31, belong to the electric-guitar innovator Les Paul.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Dec. 23: The **Howard Fishman** quartet plays tribute to Lonnie Johnson's later years, when the great bluesman branched out into jazz standards.

SMOKE

2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (864-6662)—Dec. 28-29: The New Orleans-bred drummer **Idris Muhammad** has been levitating the bandstand since the sixties; once a paragon of funk jazz, he now works with such modernists as the saxophonist Joe Lovano. A trio will be a compact showcase for this master percussionist. Dec. 31: The turban-wearing organist **Dr. Lonnie Smith** rings in the New Year.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Dec. 23: Over five decades the alto saxophonist **Jackie McLean** has become a compact compendium of modern jazz. His range makes the distinctions between bop, hard bop, and modal playing disappear. Having the expert trio of pianist **Cedar Walton** behind him will only up the improvisational ante. Dec. 25-30: The skillful alto saxophonist **Vincent Herring** steps in as Walton's featured guest for what has become an annual end-of-the-year event. Starting Dec. 31: **Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band** of New Orleans.

ZINC BAR

90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—Whether blowing tank-force tenor sax with the Mingus Big Band or making lyrical sketches on a Kip Hanrahan re-

cording (to mention just two of his myriad projects), **John Stubblefield** (here Dec. 18-19) can be counted on to make music that is at once intelligent and impassioned.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—“**Splendid Isolation: Art of Easter Island**” sparks wonderment about the speck in the South Pacific whose remarkable civilization rose and fell during the thousand years before the first white man made landfall, on Easter Sunday in 1722. Only a few works in the show—including a smallish example (weighing twelve hundred pounds) of the great stone heads—predate that fateful event; the rest are mostly nineteenth-century wooden objects from a final efflorescence of native genius. The art has a familiar Polynesian look but is haunted by the memories of a dying race whose past included disastrous civil wars and the astonishing cult of the Birdman: each year, the island's leader was selected on the basis of a perilous quest for an egg of the sooty tern. Wooden tablets display Easter Island's unique written language, which remains undecipherable to this day. Through Aug. 4. ♦ “**Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed**” traces ideals of beauty from head to toe (with notable detours at the neck, bust, and waist) and the gloriously absurd fashions that ensue in their pursuit. In the words of the designer Christian Dior, “My dream is to save women from nature.” Curator Harold Koda contrasts recent examples of haute couture with artifacts from other cultures and historic periods, so a *Commes des Garçons* organza ruff about as large as an end table shares the stage with an elaborately beaded Masai collar. Across the room a sixteenth-century metal breastplate sits near a

chrome and plastic full-body garment by Thierry Mugler (a hybrid of unitard and armor) which resembles the spawn of R2-D2 and Barbarella. Through March 17. ♦ “**Paul Signac 1863-1935: Master Neo-Impressionist**.” Through Dec. 30. ♦ “**Quintet of Remembrance**,” a handsome and pretentious video by Bill Viola, is the first work in its medium to enter the Met's collection. Through May 5. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—An Alberto Giacometti retrospective reacquaints us with the Swiss sculptor's iconic skinny statues while emphasizing his paintings and his less esteemed Surrealist objects of the nineteen-thirties. Revision is not achieved. Except for “The Palace at 4 A.M.” and “Woman with Her Throat Cut”—two 1932 marvels that bespeak bolt-from-the-blue inspiration like that of Coleridge's “Kubla Khan”—the objects show Giacometti in a weakly pandering mode. The paintings, mostly portraits from the nineteen-fifties, expend obsessive energy to visually skimpy ends. But the great statues are more engaging than ever. These tragicomic presences don't so much stand in the world as stand up to it, ravaged by the very space around them but maintaining vestigial subjectivity in the thrust of a chin, the tilt of a hip, and the set of a shoulder—calling to the heart. Through Jan. 8. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—For “**Brazil: Body & Soul**,” the Thomas Krens team has gone to new extremes, utterly transforming the museum and leaving one awed by the mega-exhibition's scope, design, audacity, and cost. The rotunda is now a Stygian theatre, with a massive baroque altarpiece in its center. From there, viewers ascend past ranks of polychromed Madonnas, carved lions, ex-votos, and tribal videos and arrive, finally, at a celestial ring of white rooms, where the baroque (which lasted nearly three centuries in Brazil) abruptly gives way to modernism. Through Jan. 27. ♦ “**Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People**.” Through March 3. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—“**Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence**.” Through Feb. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

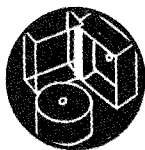
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—“**Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum**,” a modest blockbuster culled from the collections of the British Museum, opens with a group of rare wooden statuettes from the Old Kingdom. One of them still has a painted guideline running down the center of her torso. Equally fascinating is a drawing board, more than three thousand years old, with a mix of finished and practice motifs: a serene Pharaoh, a quail chick, and seven crude efforts at hands. But the show also offers plenty of moments of Ozymandian grandeur, among them a reclining lion in red granite (looking a good deal more formidable than his Fifth Avenue cousins) and a vast and trunkless head of Amenhotep III. Through Feb. 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

COOPER-HEWITT

NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (849-8300)—With a soundtrack of clinking glasses and chitchat, “**Russel Wright: Creating American Lifestyle**” offers a convivial, appealing portrait of the pragmatic modernist (1904-76). Originally a theatre designer, Wright first experimented with domestic design at the urging of his wife, Mary. Their first collection of spun-aluminum pitchers and bowls led to a whole universe of smooth, rimless forms, from furniture and cutlery to the dinnerware line, American Modern, that was as ubiquitous in our

POP NOTES: BOXED SETS



December's here, and this year, at least, that means balmy temperatures and bushes blooming out of season. It also means that boxed sets from this year's crop have begun to appear in record stores.

For historical interest, the pick of the litter is “**Lady Day**” (Sony/Legacy), the grandest assembly yet of Billie Holiday recordings. Covering the earliest phase of Holiday's career, from her arrival at Columbia, in 1933, to her departure for Decca, in 1944, this ten-disk set serves both as a documentary of her progress as a vocalist and as an encyclopedia of mid-century standards. The set is programmed in two phases, with the master recordings occupying the first six disks and alternates taking up the balance. And while “**Strange Fruit**” isn't here—Columbia wouldn't let her record it—most of her other signature songs are, including “**I Cover the Waterfront**,” “**Pennies from Heaven**,” “**All of Me**,” and “**Do Nothing 'Til You Hear from Me**.”

The season's other museum-calibre set comes courtesy of a small Austin-based label founded by the late guitarist John Fahey. “**Screamin' and Hollerin' the Blues**” (Revenant) is a shockingly thorough account of the career of the Delta bluesman Charley Patton. Bound like an album of old 78-r.p.m. records, with all fifty-two songs Patton recorded in the late nineteen-twenties and thirties, sixty tracks by studiomates and musicians in Patton's orbit, and a full disk of interviews with contemporaries, the set also includes a copy of Fahey's 1970 monograph on Patton and stickers that replicate all the original 78-r.p.m. record labels.

The archival nature of early jazz and blues recordings makes them ideal subjects for these grand collections; while there's nothing quite as impressive from the rock-and-roll world, “**Creedence Clearwater Revival**” (Fantasy) comes close. This six-CD set collects every second ever recorded by the Bay Area swamp-rock foursome, who rode leader John Fogerty's obsession with the American South into rock history. Indelible hits like “**Down on the Corner**” and “**Fortunate Son**” account for five of the CDs; the sixth includes pre-Creedence material from when the band was still called the Golliwogs, including the minor hit “**Fight Fire**.” Creedence's concision was the exception rather than the rule in the Bay Area, where the archetypal band was the jam-happy Grateful Dead. Last year, the Dead were represented by a four-CD boxed set of live material; this year's entry is “**The Golden Road: 1965-73**” (Rhino), a twelve-CD set that collects every vintage album and adds bonus tracks.

Those who came of age in the seventies rather than the sixties may prefer “**Kiss**” (Mercury), which offers hours of low-impact, cheap-thrill rock and roll. Like the face-painted, fire-breathing group itself, the boxed set is as much about packaging as it is about music, from the stark black box to the lavish booklet; there's even a more elaborate collector's version that comes in a guitar case. Package design also drives “**Can You Dig It? The '70s Soul Experience**” (Rhino), a set of six CDs stacked inside a fake 8-track cabinet. Conceived as a sequel to 1997's triumphant “**Beg, Scream & Shout! The Big Ol' Box of '60s Soul**,” this set actually charts the deterioration of the genre. While the first two disks, with hits like “**Grazing in the Grass**,” “**Westbound '99**,” and “**Family Affair**,” are of a piece with the sixties material, the latter half is cluttered with more common (and less nutritious) offerings like “**Rock the Boat**,” “**Love Rollercoaster**,” and “**Always and Forever**.”

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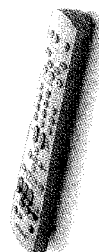
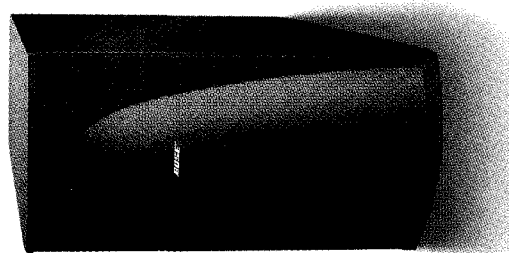
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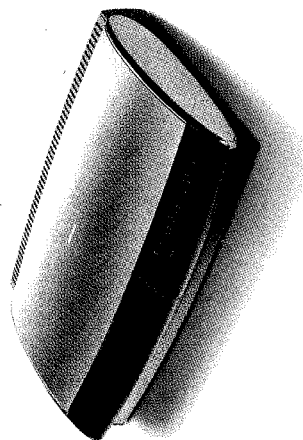
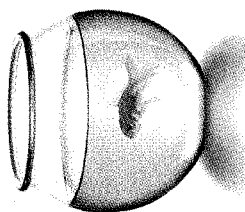
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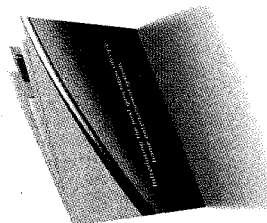
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parents' cupboards as it is on eBay today. Pioneers of name-brand marketing, the Wrights were ideologues, too, in a low-key, ardently sensible fashion: their "Guide to Easier Living," from 1950, is a manifesto of informality, envisioning a streamlined household utopia that seems to predict both "The Jetsons" and Martha Stewart. Through Sept. 15. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
583 Broadway (219-1222)—From 1997 until September 11th, the World Trade Center housed an artists-in-residence program sponsored by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. Now the New Museum has installed an exhibition called "World Views," with works by the fifteen artists whose studios were destroyed, dedicated to the memory of sculptor Michael Richards who died in the attack. Many pieces explicitly refer to the site, and much of the show now feels uncanny. The most arresting of these is a film projection by Naomi Ben-Shahar, shot at night in her studio on the ninety-second floor in early September. Flickers of light dance against the Manhattan skyline (in reality, partygoers in illuminated headgear, evoking urban fireflies or souls freed from the confines of physical form. Through Jan. 13. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, noon to 6, and Thursdays until 8.)



"The Metal Party," an installation by Josiah McElheny, at the Brooklyn Front.

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

NEIL WELLIVER

Landscapes with incongruously set nudes, à la "Dejeuner sur l'Herbe": one naked woman sits in a verdant outdoor scene with a clothed child who ignores her, another is joined by a defiantly jaunty topless friend in low-riding jeans. When Welliver moves his models into secluded swimming holes for simpler scenarios like skinny-dipping and washing up, his composition gets bolder. His clear, sunlit water, a mottled, psychedelic scrim floating over his subjects throughout the show, is so distinctive that it nearly becomes a gimmick. Through Jan. 26. (Alexandre, 41 E. 57th St. 755-2828.)

Short List

ROY LICHTENSTEIN

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400. Through Jan. 12.

GABRIEL OROZCO

Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Through Dec. 29.

MARK ROTHKO

Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through Jan. 5.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

JOHN AHEARN

The fine demotic portraitist, whose painted casts of regular South Bronx citizens were a sensation twenty years ago, has gone international. This show was made in Taiwan. Delicately tinted busts of twenty-one Taipei schoolchildren project from a faux stone wall. Fibreglass casts in bright colors render three motor scooters bearing, respectively, a family of four, a loving couple, and a man with a crate of oranges. The high spirits can seem a trifle forced. (Ahearn once allowed for less than perfect contentment in his subjects.) But the work's lyrically democratic good will is elating. Through Jan. 12. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474.)

hike. Brody's wall drawings, in the back gallery, make an appealing counterpoint. Unlike Kühn's icy, unscalable crags, Brody's geometry seems cheerfully accessible, a sort of climbing wall for the eyes. Through Dec. 22. (Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318.)

ELLEN HARVEY

Last spring, Harvey's "New York Beautification Project" had memorably odd, divisive effects: Local residents called her small Claudian lunettes vandalism (she painted on abandoned buildings, trucks, barges, and so on), while Mayor Giuliani voiced unqualified approval. Her new work moves from the picturesque to the personal. By persuading friends to pose for re-creations of snapshots from her girlhood, the artist creates a deadpan faux autobiography. But this Kilimnik-ish exercise doesn't have the enchanting gravity of the exhibition's only video, which shows Harvey's face as she simultaneously draws and poses for a self-portrait. Apart from the occasional flinch or squint, she's motionless: an icon of self-absorption. Through Dec. 22. (De Chiara, 521 W. 26th St. 967-6007.)

ANTON VIDOKLE

Wickedly elegant conceptual feints with a Mexican accent by the Russian-born New York artist. Some apparent Op paintings—gridded repetitions of a tiny trapezoidal motif, which strike the eye as 3-D, honeycomblike mazes—are actually digital prints on canvas. They use a photographed detail of a strenuously modernistic building in Mexico City. Vidokle has a nose for the melancholy hysteria of overly confident "advanced" design. Metal reliefs in swoony colors, based on corporate logos, exude abstract enthusiasm for things that they seem anxiously and poignantly unable to recall. Through Jan. 19. (Audiello, 526 W. 26th St. 675-9082.)

Short List

WILLEM DE KOONING

Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200. Through Dec. 22.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

LYNNE YAMAMOTO

Yamamoto has placed photographs of the faces of young Japanese soldiers at the centers of hundreds of paper cherry blossoms—potent symbols, identified with ephemeral beauty—and speared them to her iridescent walls on long pins. A copy of a woodblock print of the Emperor Meiji viewing blossoms in May 1881 and a set of oversized bell jars, each sandblasted with a single, ghostly flower, add to the pleasantly mournful effect. Through Jan. 19. (P.P.O.W., 476 Broome St. 941-8642.)

Short List

"WIDELY UNKNOWN"

Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 343-7300. Through Dec. 22.

GALLERIES-BROOKLYN

JOSIAH MC ELHENY

A sign at the door to "The Metal Party" asks viewers to "check all coats and bags and see the attendant for your costume." Dressing to match the installation is optional, but it wasn't on opening night, and Polaroids show McElheny's Mylar tunics accessorized with tape, tinsel, foil, cutlery, and lampshades. His attentive restaging of the 1929 Bauhaus event of the same name—he commissioned the mirrored glass balls that hang from the ceiling to replicate those that decorated the original party—recasts the movement's aesthetic radicalism as Zeitgeisty kookiness (they were into metal!). Through Jan. 13. (Public Art Fund at Brooklyn Front, 126A Front St. 718-222-1054.)

MARCELLUS HALL



Drizzle it all OVER your DESSERT.
(You may even try it on the ice cream.)

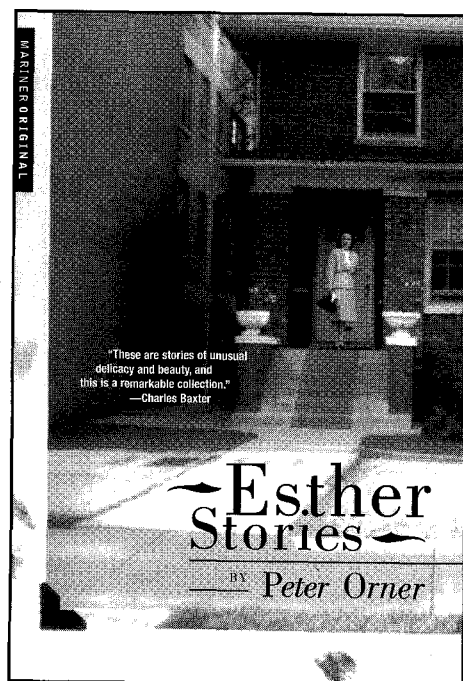


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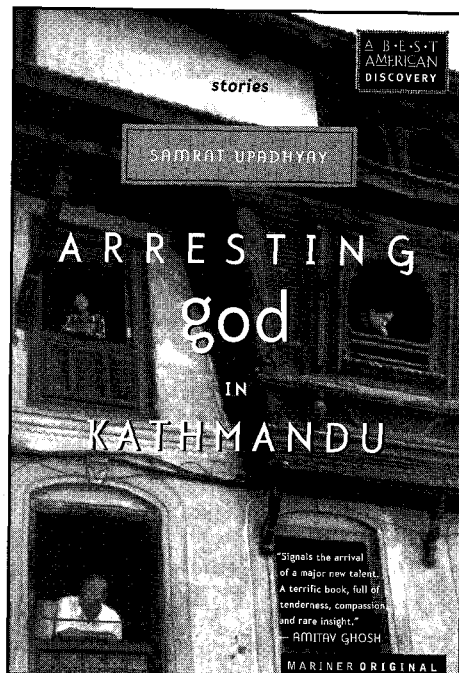
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PHOTOGRAPHY

E. J. BELLOCQ

The now legendary New Orleans photographer (1873-1949) was virtually unknown until 1970, when MOMA exhibited prints that Lee Friedlander made from some of Bellocq's original glass-plate negatives. By then the plates—of portraits of prostitutes in the Storyville red-light district of New Orleans—were in various states of deterioration, with cracks, scrapes, and water damage adding a patina that made them appealing to the modern eye. The Saul gallery is showing thirty-seven prints made about a decade before Friedlander's, when the plates were in better shape. Recently, more has been learned about Bellocq, who was a commercial photographer. The new information and the few extant pieces (including ships under construction and children dressed for their first Communion) still give no clue to what he was up to in Storyville. Through Feb. 2. (535 W. 22nd St. 627-2410.)

EMIL CADOO

In the sixties, this Bed-Stuy native turned Parisian produced the kind of erotic mishmash that came to be standard fare ten years later. However, Cadoo's couples in action, superimposed against tidal swirls or milky galaxies, had the distinction of being illustrations for Henry Miller's "Sexus" back when that kind of thing could get you in trouble. His elegant photojournalistic series "Children of Harlem," from 1965, which is also on view, has aged much better than these experiments in artsy sleaze. Through Dec. 22. (Gat, 1100 Madison Ave., at 82nd St. 327-0441.)

TIM DAVIS

Big nocturnal color shots of cheap, ugly houses bathed in garish light from commercial signs recall the old film-noir motif of a hotel room with flashing neon outside the window. Davis uses it to invest well-worn themes of forlorn Americana with feverish intensity. Gorgeous and depressing, his pictures display a sure instinct for places whose physical decay is a step in the right direction. Through Dec. 22. (Sikkema, 520 W. 22nd St. 929-2262.)

JOEL STERNFELD

Sternfeld's photographs of the High Line, an abandoned elevated train track that runs within a block of the gallery, are not just pretty, they're propaganda, too. The nonprofit organization Friends of the High Line is struggling to preserve the mile-long platform, now overgrown with grass and wildflowers, by turning it into a park modelled on Paris's Promenade Plantée. The large prints show off the disarmingly rural charms that prompted these efforts, such as the image of a small, snowy pine tree that someone has decorated with a string of lights. Through Jan. 5. (Pace/MacGill, 534 W. 25th St. 759-7999.)

JOCK STURGES

Sturges's shots of the naked and underage are either dangerously titillating or honest takes on budding adolescence, depending on your perspective. Here, he borrows freely from other artists: the black-and-white nudes, in which he poses his young subjects knee-deep in water, seem to draw equally from Sally Mann and Botticelli. The results expose the artist to another charge: pure cornball. Through Dec. 22. (Meisel, 141 Prince St. 677-1340.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—"Helmut Newton: Work," a retrospective; "The Construction of the Paris Opera: Photographs of Delmaet and Durandelle"; and "Greed" and Other Recent Acquisitions" are on show through Dec. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

PAYEL BANKA

Klotz/Sirmon, 511 W. 25th St. 327-2211. Through Feb. 2.

WYNN BULLOCK (1902-1975)

Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Through Jan. 5.

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 116 Prince St. 334-6684. Through Dec. 24.

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

"Hänsel und Gretel," the ideal opera for reluctant young listeners, was the first complete opera ever broadcast from the Met, on Christmas Day, 1931. ("Pagliacci," the sin-drenched verismo shocker also performed that afternoon, somehow didn't make it to the air.) It returns for the holiday season once again, with a cast more than strong enough to satisfy discriminating grownup tastes. Dawn Upshaw and Jennifer Larmore take the title roles, joined by Judith Forst, Stephanie Blythe, and Kim Josephson; Charles Mackerras conducts. (Dec. 19 at 7, Dec. 26 and Dec. 28 at 8, and Dec. 29 at 1:30.) ♦ "La Bohème," with Christina Gallardo-Domas, Alexandra von der Weth, Alfredo Portilla, and Anthony Michaels-Moore; Carlo Rizzi. (Dec. 28 at 8.) ♦ With Ramón Vargas replacing Portilla. (Dec. 24 at 7:30 and Dec. 28 at 8.) ♦ A gala New Year's Eve performance by the same cast, with dining and entertainment following the show. (Dec. 31 at 7:30.) ♦ Herbert Wernicke's new production of "Die Frau Ohne Schatten," with Deborah Voigt, Gabriele Schnaut, Hanna Schwarz, Thomas Moser, Wolfgang Brendel, and Eike Wilm Schulte; Christian Thielemann. (Dec. 21 and Jan. 1 at 7.) ♦ With Reinhild Runkel, John Horton Murray, and Harry Dworthak replacing Schwarz, Moser, and Schulte. (Dec. 27 at 7.) ♦ The final performance this season of "La Traviata," with June Anderson, Frank Lopardo, and Anthony Michaels-Moore; Maurizio Benini. (Dec. 22 at 1:30.) ♦ Valery Gergiev conducts the season premiere of Verdi's "Don Carlo," with Galina Gorchakova, Irina Mishura, Richard Margison (in the title role), Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Samuel Ramey, and Paata Burchuladze. (Dec. 29 at 7.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA

The venerable chamber company presents "The Magic Flute," in English, conducted and directed by Anthony Amato. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Dec. 22 and Dec. 28-29 at 7:30 and Dec. 23 and Dec. 30 at 2:30. ♦ **Note:** The company also presents a gala New Year's Eve performance, Dec. 31 at 7.)

MUSIC FOR THE HOLIDAYS

HANDEL'S "MESSIAH"

The choir of St. Thomas Episcopal Church, with the early-music group Concert Royal and soloists, offers its final holiday performance. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. For information about tickets, call 664-9360. Dec. 20 at 7:30.) ♦ The thirty-fourth annual "Messiah Sing-In" lets the audience, up to three thousand strong, be the chorus; bring a score or buy one at the door. (Avery Fisher Hall. 333-5333. Dec. 20 at 8.) ♦ Andrew Megill conducts the Masterwork Chorus and Orchestra in its fortieth annual presentation of "Messiah," at Carnegie Hall. (247-7800. Dec. 22 at 2 and 8.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Dec. 19: The countertenor Derek Lee Ragin joins the musicians of the Aulos Ensemble for a program of Bach, Vivaldi, Couperin, Rameau, and carols. ♦ Dec. 20: The Four Nations Ensemble offers "Enchanted Nights," vocal and instrumental music by Corrette ("Noëls" for strings and harpsichord), Byrd, Biber, and others. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Both programs are presented at 6:30 and 8:30.)

VOICES OF ASCENSION

Dennis Keene conducts the noted choral ensemble in a program of holiday music from the Middle Ages to the present, including a selection of Christ-

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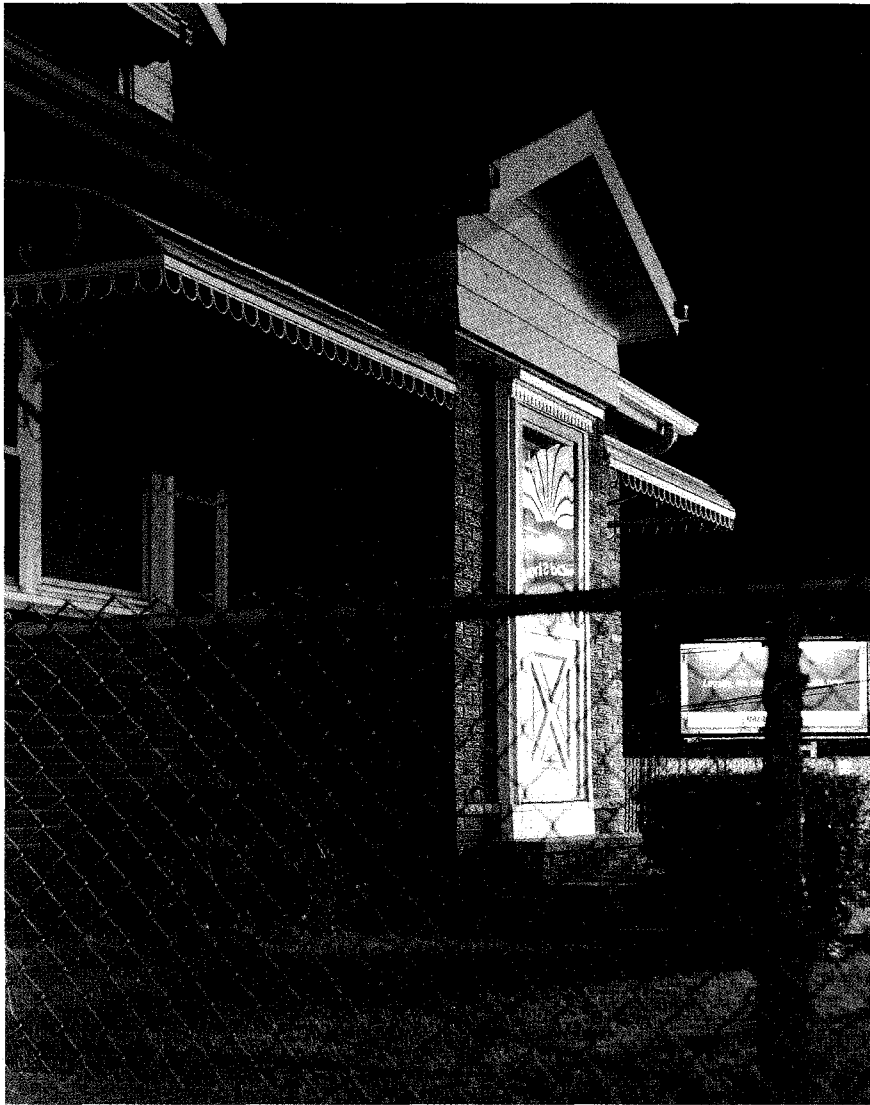
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mas carols (in David Willcocks's classic arrangements). (Church of the Ascension, Fifth Ave. at 10th St. 358-1469. Dec. 20 at 8 and Dec. 23 at 5.)

AVERY FISHER HALL

Dec. 22 at 8: J. Walter Turnbull leads the Boys Choir of Harlem in a selection of holiday favorites, with members of the Philharmonic lending a hand. ♦ Dec. 23 at 7:30: The Klezmer Conservatory Band offers a "Klezmerfest" of traditional Jewish music. (721-6500.)

ST. CECILIA CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA

David Randolph conducts Bach's "Christmas Oratorio." (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 23 at 3.)

MUSICA VIVA OF NEW YORK

Walter Klauss leads his orchestra and chorus in music by Pergolesi, Finzi, and Bruce Saylor, along with a selection of congregational carols. (Unitarian Church of All Souls, Lexington Ave. at 80th St. Dec. 24 at 8 and 11. No tickets required.)

"NOVA: A MEDIEVAL CHRISTMAS"

The Ensemble for Early Music concludes its series of holiday concerts, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 280-0330. Dec. 25 at 3 and 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

In the orchestra's last subscription series of the year, David Zinman conducts an all-Slavic program: Glinka's overture to "Ruslan and Ludmilla," Dvořák's "New World" Symphony, and

Glazunov's Violin Concerto (with Midori). (Dec. 28-29 and Jan. 3-5 at 8.) ♦ The early-music guru John Eliot Gardiner makes his Philharmonic debut in the orchestra's annual New Year's Eve concert, conducting Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the opening chorale from Bach's Cantata No. 27, "Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende!"; the matchup of Gardiner's finely calibrated style with the Philharmonic's rough-and-ready attitude could turn out to be one of the most intriguing collaborations of the year. The vocal soloists include the mezzo-soprano Marietta Simpson, the tenor Stuart Neill, and the bass-baritone John Relyea. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Dec. 31 at 8.)

NEW YORK STRING ORCHESTRA

Carnegie Hall's proud holiday tradition, a convocation of young virtuosos conducted by Jaime Laredo. Dec. 24 at 7: Music by Mozart and Beethoven (the "Emperor" Concerto, with the pianist Leon Fleisher). ♦ Dec. 28 at 8: The cellist Sharon Robinson and the pianist Joseph Kalichstein join the ensemble for a program of Britten, Beethoven (the "Triple Concerto"), and Mendelssohn. (247-7800.)

RECITALS

BRENTANO STRING QUARTET

Bach's "The Art of Fugue"—the apogee of Baroque counterpoint—is the anchor for this superb young American quartet's final concert in its Merkin Concert Hall cycle "The Art of Fugues."

They complete their program with polyphonically inclined music by Haydn, Shostakovich (the Piano Quintet, with Jeremy Denk), and the Juilliard faculty composer Jonathan Dawe (the première of his "Liber de Arte Contrapuncti"). (129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Dec. 19 at 8.)

KALICHSTEIN-LAREDO-ROBINSON TRIO

The group performs piano trios by Ravel and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, along with Dvořák's Piano Quintet (with help from two members of the Emerson String Quartet, the violinist Philip Setzer and the violist Lawrence Dutton). (92nd St. Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5550. Dec. 19 at 8.)

COUNTER)INDUCTION: "ANOUMENON"

The contemporary chamber ensemble presents a program highlighting what it calls "the oft-neglected visceral side of modern music," featuring musical art brut by Vinko Globokar, John Cage (the "Concert for Piano and Orchestra"), Joël F. Durand (a violent little String Trio), and others. (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. Dec. 20 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

BARGEMUSIC

Dec. 20 and Dec. 21 at 7:30: Music by Handel and Vivaldi ("The Four Seasons"), with the violinists Mark Peskanov and Colin Jacobsen, the harpsichordist Robert Wolinsky, and others. ♦ Dec. 22 at 7:30 and Dec. 23 at 4: The violist Toby Hoffman and the cellist Clive Greensmith join Peskanov for Beethoven's three String Trios, Op. 9. ♦ The floating chamber-music series presents two holiday concerts (coordinated by Fred Sherry) traversing the complete Brandenburg Concertos. Dec. 24 at 7:30: Concertos Nos. 1, 2, and 4. ♦ Dec. 31 at 7:30: Concertos Nos. 6, 5, and 3. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Complete programs of Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos have become a secular counterpoint to midnight Mass—a holiday celebration of human logic, physical energy, and resilient optimism. The Society has assembled an all-star cast for these performances, including the flutist Emanuel Pahud, the violinists Hilary Hahn and Cho-Liang Lin, and the bassist Edgar Meyer. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5788. Dec. 20-21 at 8 and Dec. 23 at 5.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"A DAY AT THE BOWERY MUSIC HALL"

The comedian Trav S. D. and assorted friends recreate the days when Tony Pastor, the Father of Vaudeville, kept audiences gasping and laughing with clog dancing, comic sketches, singing, Irish folk music, and other forms of entertainment. (New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. For more information, call 873-3400, ext. 263. Dec. 29, starting at 11 A.M.)

READINGS

Jan. 1, starting at 2: Patti Smith, Jim Carroll, Edwin Torres, and more than a hundred other musicians, poets, dancers, and performing artists gather for the annual marathon reading at the Poetry Project. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ Jan. 1, starting at 4: Another hundred or so other performers of a downtown ilk ring in the New Year with eight hours of poems and music. (Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS

Dec. 19 at 8: Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, the author of "Kosher Sex," discusses the effects of pornography on human relations with Lindsey Vuolo, *Playboy's* Miss November. The editor Judith Regan is the moderator. (Makor, 35 W. 67th St. 601-1000.) ♦ Dec. 20 at 6:30: The artist Matthew Ritchie talks about the paintings of Alfred Jensen which are on view at the Dia Center for the Arts. (548 W. 22nd St. 989-5566.)

WALK

Dec. 31 at 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10: Howard Goldberg, of Adventure on a Shoestring, leads tours through Manhattan's Chinatown. Each jaunt ends with an optional dinner at a local restaurant. For more information, call 265-2663.

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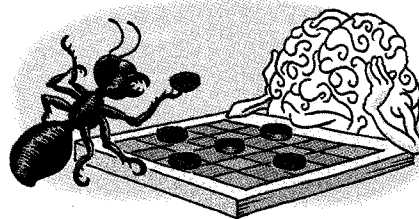
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BOOK CURRENTS

Get Smart

Last year, a Japanese scientist announced that he had taught slime mold to find its way through a maze. How could a mold, which is an amoebalike organism made up of thousands of single-cell units, solve a puzzle? As Steven Johnson reveals in **EMERGENCE** (Scribner), the answer lies in the alchemy of "complex



adaptive systems," in which unintelligent parts act together to create a much smarter whole. Johnson examines how this process is found all over the natural world: in ant colonies, where individual ants with little sense of the body politic act for the good of the nest; and in the human brain, where single neurons join together to create consciousness. In all such cases, intelligence "emerges" spontaneously through the interaction of the system's constituent elements. Johnson applies the lessons of this "swarm logic" to our computer networks, and muses on humanity itself as a macroorganism. "Is there a genuine global brain in our future?" he writes.

According to Howard Bloom, the Web is moving us toward a worldwide integration of minds, but this confluence is only the most recent step in a process that started with the Big Bang. In **GLOBAL BRAIN** (Wiley), Bloom argues that ever since the first neutron courted the first proton, our universe has been governed by the impulse to congregate. Evolution, he says, means fierce competition, though not so much between individuals as between groups with different "problem-solving webs." And human beings are very much a part of the game. For those who worry that our ingenuity has upset nature's equilibrium, Bloom has a message that is both reassuring and sobering. "We are nature incarnate," he writes. "We are tools of her probings and if, indeed, we suffer and we fail, from our lessons she will learn which way in the future not to turn."

—William Cohen

TONY MILLONARE

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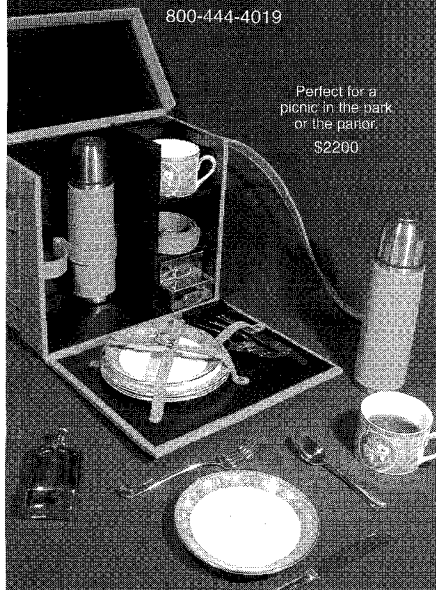
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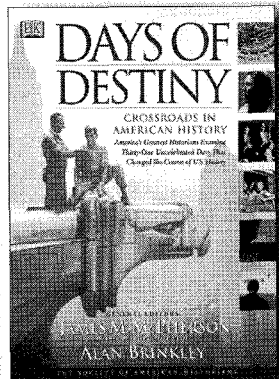
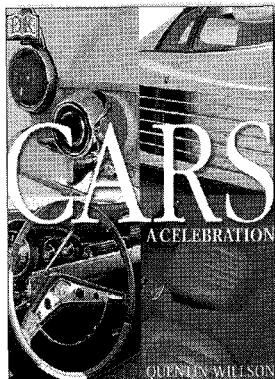
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Days of Destiny: **Crossroads in American History** edited by James M. McPherson & Alan Brinkley

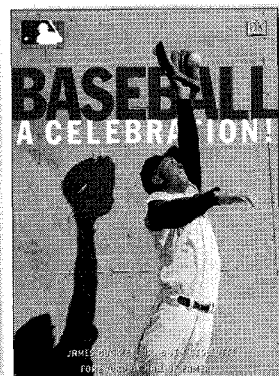
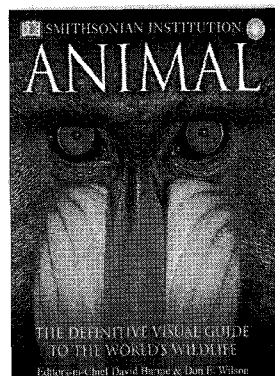
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Baseball: A Celebration! by James Buckley, Jr. & Jim Gigliotti

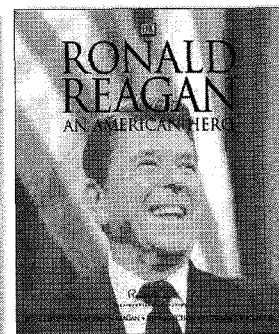
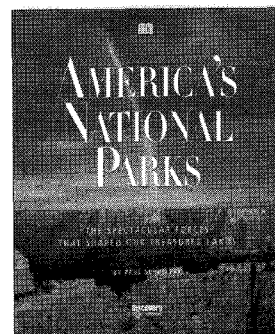
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MOVIES OPENING

ALI

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 25.

A BEAUTIFUL MIND

Ron Howard directed this dramatization of the life of John Forbes Nash, Jr. (Russell Crowe), a Nobel Prize-winning mathematician who suffers from schizophrenia. Jennifer Connelly plays his wife. Opening Dec. 21.

BEHIND THE SUN

A drama about two Brazilian families locked in a bloody feud over disputed rangeland. Walter Salles ("Central Station") directed. In Portuguese. Opening Dec. 21. (Sunshine Cinema.)

BLACK HAWK DOWN

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 28.

CHARLOTTE GRAY

An adaptation of Sebastian Faulk's novel about a Scottish woman (Cate Blanchett) who joins a secret mission in Nazi-occupied France. With Billy Crudup and Michael Gambon. Gillian Armstrong is the director. Opening Dec. 28.

DARK BLUE WORLD

Jan Sverak ("Kolya") directed this drama about the friendship of two Czech R.A.F. pilots who fall in love with the same woman (Tara Fitzgerald). In Czech, English, and German. Opening Dec. 28.

GOSFORD PARK

Robert Altman's new film, a murder mystery set at an English country estate. The ensemble cast includes Maggie Smith, Emily Watson, Kristin Scott Thomas, Alan Bates, Helen Mirren, and Clive Owen. Opening Dec. 26.

HOW HIGH

Method Man and Redman play two stoners who smoke a magic weed that augments their intelligence, in a comedy directed by Jesse Dylan. With Fred Willard. Opening Dec. 21.

I AM SAM

A drama with Sean Penn as a mentally handicapped man fighting to retain custody of his seven-year-old daughter; Michelle Pfeiffer plays the attorney who takes his case. Jessie Nelson directed. Opening Dec. 28.

IMPOSTOR

Gary Fleder's sci-fi thriller, based on a Philip K. Dick story, in which a government scientist (Gary Sinise) is accused of being an alien spy. Also with Madeleine Stowe and Tony Shalhoub. Opening Dec. 25.

JIMMY NEUTRON: BOY GENIUS

An animated tale about the smartest boy in the world and his robot dog. Opening Dec. 21.

JOE SOMEBODY

In John Pasquin's comedy, Tim Allen plays a Minnesota corporate drone who seeks revenge after a co-worker (Patrick Warburton) humiliates him on Take Your Child to Work Day. Opening Dec. 21.

KATE & LEOPOLD

A time-travel romantic drama with Hugh Jackman, Meg Ryan, Liev Schreiber, and Natasha Lyonne. James Mangold ("Girl, Interrupted") is the director. Opening Dec. 21.

LITTLE OTIK

A new animated film from Jan Svankmajer, based on a fairy tale in which an infertile couple adopts a tree stump as their baby. In Czech. Opening Dec. 19. (Film Forum).

THE LORD OF THE RINGS:

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

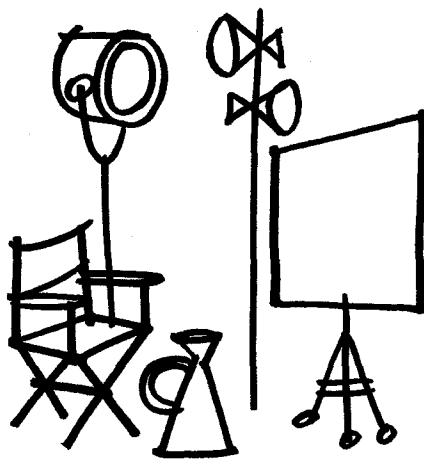
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 19.

THE MAJESTIC

Frank Darabont directed this drama with Jim Carrey as a blacklisted screenwriter who loses his memory in a car accident. Also with Martin Landau and Laurie Holden. Opening Dec. 21.

MONSTER'S BALL

A prison guard (Billy Bob Thornton) begins an affair with the wife (Halle Berry) of the man he has just executed in this drama directed by Marc Forster. The cast includes Heath Ledger, Sean Combs, and Peter Boyle. Opening Dec. 26.



THE SHIPPING NEWS

Lasse Hallström directed this adaptation of Annie Proulx's novel about a man (Kevin Spacey) who moves to his ancestral Newfoundland home after the death of his wife. With Julianne Moore, Judi Dench, and Cate Blanchett. Opening Dec. 25.

FILM NOTES

THE AFFAIR OF THE NECKLACE

Visual hokey from the director Charles Shyer about an eighteenth-century French noblewoman (Hilary Swank) who attempts to lie her way to greater wealth. Swank's laborious performance (she's too naturalistic an actress for such haughty manners) and the ham-fisted dialogue (delivered, mysteriously, with an English accent) sink the film into the lush folds of bad costume drama. The cast includes Joely Richardson and Jonathan Pryce surrounded by sets of such museumlike stateliness that the actors seem afraid to touch anything.—Bruce Diones (First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Village East Cinemas.)

AMÉLIE

A waifish Parisienne discovers her mission in life: to bring unexpected happiness to others, and so to herself. Such is the story of Amélie (Audrey Tautou), and the simplicity of it—not to mention its dangerous surfeit of sweetness—appears to have touched a universal nerve. (In truth, the saga of the movie's success is more telling than anything in the movie itself.) Tautou is clearly a find, although one wonders what Mathieu Kassovitz, who plays the object of her affection, made of his role; it was Kassovitz who, in 1995, yanked French cinema up to date with his baring of ethnic hostilities in "La Haine." The Paris of this new movie lies at the other extreme, although what nags at you most is not the neighborly charm but the itchy, unsettled manner of the director, Jean-Pierre Jeunet. How far should we trust a plea for benevolence when it feels like a box of tricks? In French.—Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 11/5/01.) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Paris.)

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

The Irish director John Moore, who made his mark with flashy television commercials, takes those techniques and applies them to the ballistic speed of modern warfare. Sometimes the results are stunning, as in a sequence involving two persistent surface-to-air missiles; sometimes they are merely incoherent. The war in question is the Bosnian conflict, and, in a daring decision, the movie drops the comedic actor Owen Wilson into a situation worthy of John Rambo. His Navy plane has been shot down on a photo-recon flight over restricted territory, and an entire Serb battalion is looking for him. Wilson seems promising as a hypervocal Holden Caulfield gone to war, but he's never given the opportunity to develop into an action antihero. The movie is equally one-dimensional: the NATO admiral is reduced to another villain with a bad accent and little respect for American-style justice.

The Serbs, of course, are cannon fodder.—Michael Agger (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE BUSINESS OF STRANGERS

A joyless, time-starved executive (Stockard Channing) spends an evening in the company of the underling (Julia Stiles) she just fired. They make up over too many drinks and then, for good measure, hatch a plan to humiliate a wolfish headhunter (Frederick Weller), thus righting the wrongs inflicted by corporate man. You can sense the setup of Patrick Stettner's first feature creaking beneath the weight of contrivance, and all the shots of the characters coldly caged in glass and steel are an elegant way of making a fairly obvious point. But the two lead actresses breathe, or maybe slap, life into the whole conceit, and Channing offers a fine case study in frustration—a career's worth of rage, let loose for a single night.—A.L. (12/17/01) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND

Steven Spielberg's 1977 celebration of the wonders up there in the skies is the best-humored of all technological-magical fantasies. It has visionary magic and a childlike comic spirit, along with a love of surprises and a skeptical, let's-try-it-on spirit. It sends you out in a state of blissful satisfaction.—Pauline Kael (Cinema Classics; Dec. 25.)

CODE UNKNOWN

A mosaic of stories, most of them disheartening. There is the occasional moment in Michael Haneke's film when the characters stumble upon pleasure, but it soon passes; as the title suggests, they have enough trouble establishing lines of communication among themselves. Anne (Juliette Binoche) is an actress whose relations with her lover (Thierry Nivuc) flicker from silence to tiff; Jean (Alexandre Hamidi) is a boy in baffled conflict with his father; Amadou (Ona Lu Yenke) is a young black teacher, arrested for trying to stand up for a beggar; and the beggar herself, Maria (Luminita Gheorghiu), is a Romanian immigrant crumpled with shame. Haneke cuts back and forth from one to the next with such skill, and with so little superfluous detail, that the effect is oddly bracing; his is not the portentous alienation of Antonioni, but the hard, topical distillation of ethnic strife—not of a Europe deep in thought, but of a Europe under fire. In French, with many of the characters speaking their native languages.—A.L. (12/3/01) (Quad Cinema.)

DUCK SOUP

The Marx Brothers in their greatest movie—a semi-surrealist farce about war, completed in 1933. With Margaret Dumont, Edgar Kennedy, and Louis Calhern. The unsentimental screenplay is by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby, who also did the songs.—P.K. (Film Forum; Dec. 27-29.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE

J. K. Rowling, having drawn even reluctant readers back to the lonely pleasure of a book, is now witnessing their dispersal. The movie is exactly what you would expect: spirited, efficient, glazed with effects, and almost servile in its fidelity to the novel. Harry is played by Daniel Radcliffe, who, though a touch too old for the part, fills it with unfazed amiability; more successful still, perhaps, are Emma Watson and Rupert Grint, enjoying themselves as his sidekicks. A roll call of British actors infests the staff at Hogwarts School: Richard Harris, Maggie Smith, and Alan Rickman, with the already well-built Robbie Coltrane finding fresh girth as the rumbustious Hagrid. The movie takes its time—the director, Chris Columbus, and his screenwriter, Steve Kloves, seem most interested in portraying good companionship—and yet the final half-hour feels rushed and unarousing. Even before the film opened, the grosses were assured, and yet, for all the magic—the broomsticks, the bank staffed by goblins, the troll in the bathroom—the work itself remains oddly unmagical, grounded in mortal fun.—A.L. (11/19/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

IN THE BEDROOM

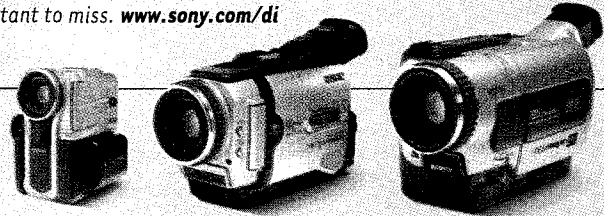
In Camden, Maine, a twenty-one-year-old college student, Frank (Nick Stahl), is having a headlong

SONY

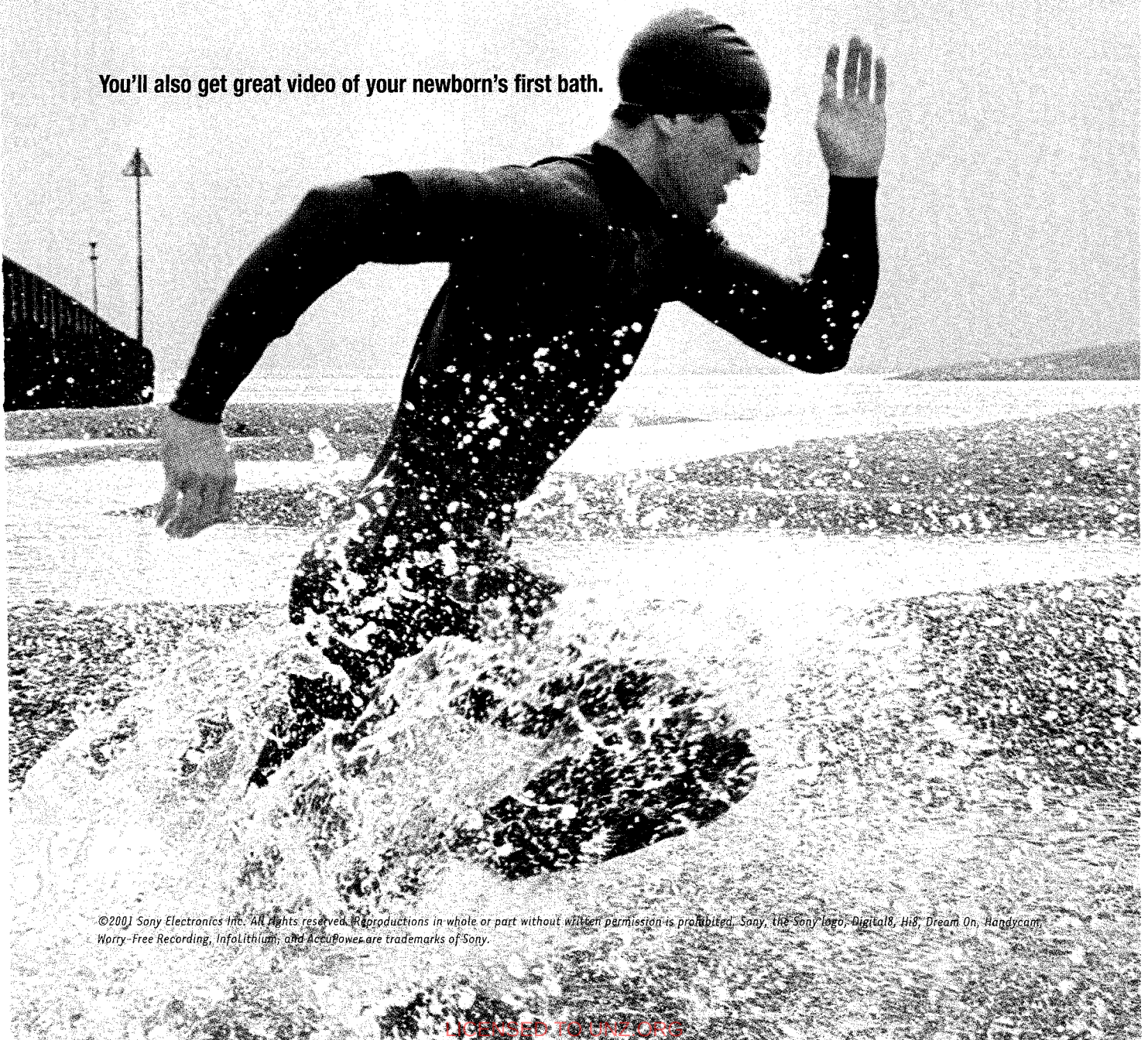
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Opening December 28, Josh Hartnett in "Black Hawk Down."

summer affair with a local woman, Natalie (Marisa Tomei), who has two little boys. Natalie is separated from her husband (William Mapother), the loutish scion of a prominent local family. When the husband kills his rival, Frank's hypercivilized parents (Tom Wilkinson and Sissy Spacek) begin to consider vengeance as a way of saving themselves from destroying each other. This Sophoclean tale, fleshed out from an intriguing, elliptical short story by André Dubus, draws its strength from minute observation of settings, moods, and manners in Camden and from a gradual tightening of the winch. Much of it is very quiet (the first-time director, Todd Field, is an actor and a photographer), but when it explodes, the violence, both verbal and physical, actually means something.—*David Denby* (11/26/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

IT SHOULD HAPPEN TO YOU

Judy Holliday in a pleasantly erratic 1954 satirical comedy; the targets—advertising, TV, and urban gullibility—are rather easily pinked, but the director, George Cukor, doesn't loiter over them for long. The heroine, who yearns for celebrity, takes her life savings and places her name—Gladys Glover—in giant letters across a billboard in Columbus Circle. Before long, she is as inescapably in the public eye as one of the Gabor. She also tosses about in romantic indecision: should she give her heart to an honest documentary filmmaker (Jack Lemmon, in his Hollywood debut) and say farewell to the big time, or should she surrender herself to the sudsy

embraces of a soap manufacturer (Peter Lawford)?—*P.K.* (Museum of Modern Art; Dec. 20.)

KANDAHAR

The latest film by the Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf couldn't be better timed. The story is just a series of gestures: Nafas (Nelofer Pazira), an Afghan woman who left her country as a teen-ager, returns to look for her suicidal sister. On the way to Kandahar (conceived as a state of mind as much as a place), Nafas runs into a variety of helpers disguising themselves to avoid persecution by the Taliban—men in burkas, a boy faking an inability to read the Koran, a benevolent African-American wearing a false beard. The sequences don't have much continuity, but Makhmalbaf turns the desolation of the country into scenes of iconic power. The repeated motif: flimsy new plastic and wooden legs made for the many who have lost their limbs to land mines. In Farsi and English.—*D.D.* (12/10/01) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

The new Coen-brothers project is shot in smooth, glittering monochrome: a calmly told tale of murder without mayhem. We are on the brink of the nineteen-fifties, with its distinctive fears and badges of honor: Big Dave (James Gandolfini) can still lay claim to a good war record, while his wife, in all honesty, reports a visit from outer space. Billy Bob Thornton plays Ed, a barber living quietly with his wife (Frances McDormand) in northern California. He tries his hand at blackmail, and the plan misfires—justice catches up with him in the end, al-

though, even then, he is the wrong man. The whole film has the air of a clever, unthrilling conceit—a guided tour of film noir, without the sweat and compulsions of the real thing.—*A.L.* (11/5/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, Village East Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

MONSTERS, INC.

A thoroughly charming movie from the artists and storytellers at Pixar which wins you over with its jazzy, retro title sequence and then introduces the pun-filled world of Monstropolis, where creatures of all description toil in factories, collecting the screams of children. The visual invention is on par with Pixar's previous effort, "Toy Story 2," but the crazy quilt of cultural references and backdoor subversiveness of that movie gets toned down for something more sugary. John Goodman and Billy Crystal give voice to the two heroes, but the gold star goes to John Ratzenberger (Cliff from "Cheers") for his homespun Abominable Snowman.—*M.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3, East 86th Street Cinema, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

OCEAN'S ELEVEN

Steven Soderbergh's remake of the famously lazy Vegas heist movie from 1960 bristles with energy. Instead of the ineffably casual Rat Pack, Soderbergh has a cast of hardworking guys: George Clooney in the old Sinatra role as the criminal mastermind, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Don Cheadle, Andy Garcia, and, in colorful support, Elliott Gould and Carl Reiner. Soderbergh constructs the movie in layers with lines of terse dialogue winging on and off the screen and fitting perfectly together. The robbery itself also depends on many interlocking pieces of theatre—moments of imposture and fakery which allow the gang members to breach the inner sanctum of the casinos. Despite all the cleverness and good humor, however, the movie peters out, and, by the end, you may wonder what it's all for. With Julia Roberts in a senseless role as a magnificently dressed art expert who works as "curator" at the Bellagio.—*D.D.* (12/10/01) (84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS

After the brilliance of "Rushmore," his levelheaded look at the gifts of a misfit, where could Wes Anderson go next? In the event, he has broadened his scope to take in an entire family of misfits: the Tenenbaums, residing in their colorful town house like kooky modern leftovers from the age of Edith Wharton—an age of innocence indeed, despite the ill will that gusts around. The parents (Gene Hackman and Anjelica Huston) raised three overachieving children (Ben Stiller, Luke Wilson, and Gwyneth Paltrow) and then separated. We are here for the aftermath: the daughter's fading marriage to a bearded melancholic (Bill Murray), and other sundarings and patchings-up. The movie is packed tight with strong, if baffled, feelings, and yet we could be watching it through glass; Anderson specializes in the cool, astringent gaze, and for anyone sick of Hollywood heart-melters, this could be the antidote. With Owen Wilson, who co-wrote the film, and a meticulous Danny Glover.—*A.L.* (12/7/01) (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

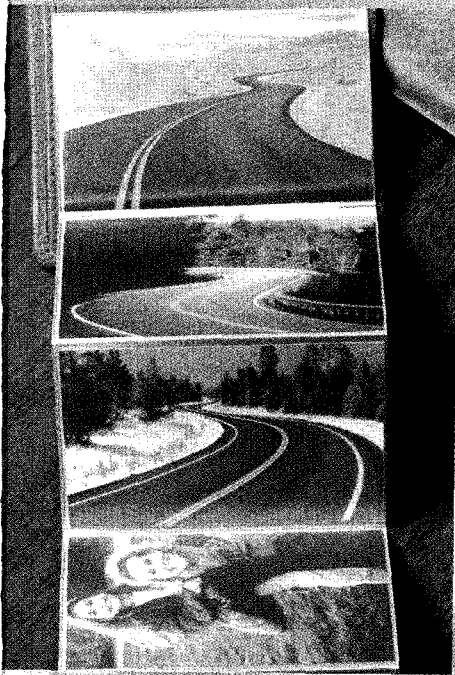
SIDEWALKS OF NEW YORK

The pits. Another derivative romantic comedy from writer/director/actor Ed Burns—this one co-starring Heather Graham—that fails to be either charming or funny. That the film inspires a longing for an early Woody Allen film only lessens the experience.—*B.D.* (East 85th Street, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

SOME LIKE IT HOT

Billy Wilder's 1959 comedy, set in the Prohibition era, with transvestism, impotence, role confusion, and borderline inversion—and all hilariously innocent, though always on the brink of really disastrous double-entendre. Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon are the musicians who witness the St. Valentine's Day Massacre and then hide out from the mobsters by disguising themselves as women and joining an all-girl band. Curtis demonstrates a parodistic gift with an imitation of Cary Grant (which he went on doing for

JACK UNRUH

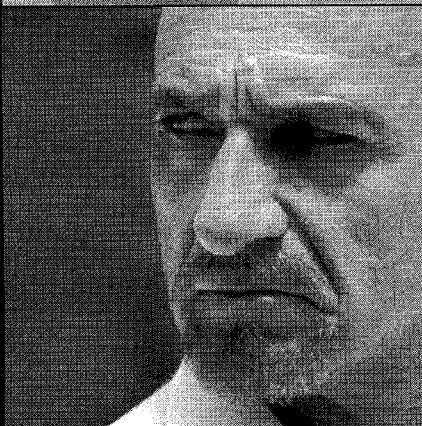


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Best Supporting Actor

Ben
Kingsley



"Ben Kingsley's performance jolts the movie like an exposed high-voltage wire."
A.O. Scott, THE NEW YORK TIMES

SEXY BEAST



Best Actress

Tilda
Swinton



"The glory of the picture is the magnificent Tilda Swinton."
Elvis Mitchell, THE NEW YORK TIMES

THE DEEP END



years afterward), and Lemmon is demoniacally funny—he really gives in to women's clothes, and begins to think of himself as a sexy girl. Marilyn Monroe gives perhaps her most characteristic performance, which means that she's both charming and embarrassing.—P.K. (Film Forum; Dec. 30-31.)

SPY GAME

Or, blond on blond. Robert Redford plays an old-school C.I.A. agent, a cynical, manipulative sort who harbors a rebellious, anti-bureaucratic streak. Brad Pitt is his protégé, a hotshot who disapproves of his boss's amorality. The movie is set in 1991, on the last day of Redford's career in the agency. Pitt has been arrested by the Chinese, and Michael

murder and disfigured (he sometimes shouts through a plastic mask). The movie jumps in and out of dreams and nightmares, rushes forward and backward, and the only thing that emerges clearly is that a big star is coming to terms with the anxiety of losing his looks. It's one of those rare movies that manage to be overwrought and completely boring. Cameron Crowe, who wrote and directed it, has to begin all over again and figure out why he wanted to be a movie director.—D.D. (42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)



FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE *Five masterworks created by the wildly original fantasist Alexandr Ptushko arrive at Walter Reade Theatre on December 28. His dark, folkloric tales (think hunchbacked witches) are the perfect holiday tonic.*

Frost Beckner and David Arata's complicated screenplay lays out Redford's attempt to save him and intercuts it with flashbacks of their tortuous relationship as it unfolded in locales like Vietnam, Berlin, and Beirut. Tony Scott's visual panache, as always, obscures most of the issues raised by the script. The movie comes out against the callousness of using people for political ends while treating most of the people around the two gleaming stars as callously as possible.—D.D. (Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

VANILLA SKY

This Hollywood remake of the 1997 Spanish movie "Abre los Ojos" can only be called *un desastre*. Tom Cruise plays a magazine-empire heir who lives in the Dakota and works (apparently) in the Condé Nast building—he's a playboy publisher splitting his time between Cameron Diaz and Penélope Cruz (who re-creates her role from the original as a tempestuous free spirit). There is an accident, and Cruise winds up charged with

ALSO PLAYING

HEIST (11/12/01)

Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

JUNG (WAR) IN THE LAND OF THE MUJAHEDDIN (11/26/01)

Cinema Village.

LANTANA

Union Square.

NO MAN'S LAND

Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

NOT ANOTHER TEEN MOVIE

Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

WAKING LIFE (11/12/01)

First & 62nd Cinemas and Union Square.

GERARD DUBOIS

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*Clay Figure of Kasyapa; Western Wei period
(535-557); Maijishan cave 87, southern Gansu;
Maijishan Research Institute.*



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THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave.,
Brooklyn.
Beckman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
(398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of
Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center
(875-5600).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—
Through Dec. 31: "Alice's Adventures on Film." Dec.
22 and Dec. 26 at 2: "Alice in Wonderland" (1933,
Norman Z. McLeod), with W. C. Fields as Humpty
Dumpty. ♦ Dec. 22-23 at 4: Disney's "Alice"
cartoons (1923-26). ♦ Dec. 23, Dec. 27, and Dec. 30 at
2: "Alice in Wonderland" (1951, Dallas Bower), with
stop-motion animation by Lou Bunin. ♦ Dec. 28-29
and Dec. 31 at 2: "Alice in Wonderland" (1951,
Clyde Geronimi), the Disney animated version. ♦
Dec. 29 at 4: "Dreamchild" (1985, Gavin Millar). ♦
Dec. 30 at 4: "Alice" (1988, Jan Svankmajer). ♦ Repertory
nights. Dec. 22-23 at 6:30: "Wild Strawberries"
(1957, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Dec. 29-30:
"Steamboat Bill, Jr." (1928, Charles Reisner),
with live piano by Donald Sosin.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—Dec. 19-23
at 6:30: "As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw
Brief Glimpses of Beauty" (2000, Jonas Mekas). ♦
The theatre will be closed until Jan. 3, 2002.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Dec.
19 at 4:30, 6:30, and 9:10: "Chutney Popcorn"
(1999, Nisha Ganatra). ♦ Dec. 20 at 4:30, 6:50, and
9:10: "Monolog" (1972, Ilya Averbakh; in Russian). ♦
The repertory theatre will be closed until
Jan. 21, 2002.

CINEMA CLASSICS

332 E. 11th St. (677-5368)—Dec. 19: "Ashes and Diamonds" (1958, Andrej Wajda; in Polish). ♦ Dec. 21-23: "The Seventh Seal" (1956, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Dec. 25: "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (†). ♦ Dec. 26-27: "Mr. Hulot's Holiday" (1953, Jacques Tati; in French). ♦ Dec. 28-30: "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1919, Robert Wiene), accompanied by the music of Radiohead. ♦ Jan. 1: "Gate of Hell" (1954, Teinosuke Kinugasa; in Japanese).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—
Through Feb. 7: "Greatest Hits." Dec. 19 at 1, 3:40,
6:30, and 9:20: "Brazil" (1985, Terry Gilliam). ♦ Dec.
20-22 at 1, 5:25, and 9:50: "Raging Bull" (1980,
Martin Scorsese). ♦ Dec. 20-22 at 3:20 and 7:45:
"Taxi Driver" (1976, Scorsese). ♦ Dec. 23-24 at 1:30,
4:15, 7, and 9:40: "Dial M for Murder" (1954, Alfred
Hitchcock), in 3-D. ♦ Dec. 25-26 at 1:30, 4:15, 7,
and 9:40: "Kiss Me Kate" (1953, George Sidney), in
3-D. ♦ Dec. 27-29 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "A Hard Day's
Night" (1964, Richard Lester). ♦ Dec. 27-29 at 2:40,
5:40, and 8:40: "Duck Soup" (†). ♦ Dec. 30-31 at 1,
5:25, and 9:50: "The Apartment" (1960, Billy
Wilder). ♦ Dec. 30-31 at 3:15 and 7:40: "Some Like
It Hot" (†). ♦ Jan. 1 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: "Double
Indemnity" (1944, Wilder). ♦ Jan. 1 at 2:55, 6:35, and
10:15: "The Lady Eve" (1941, Preston Sturges).

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

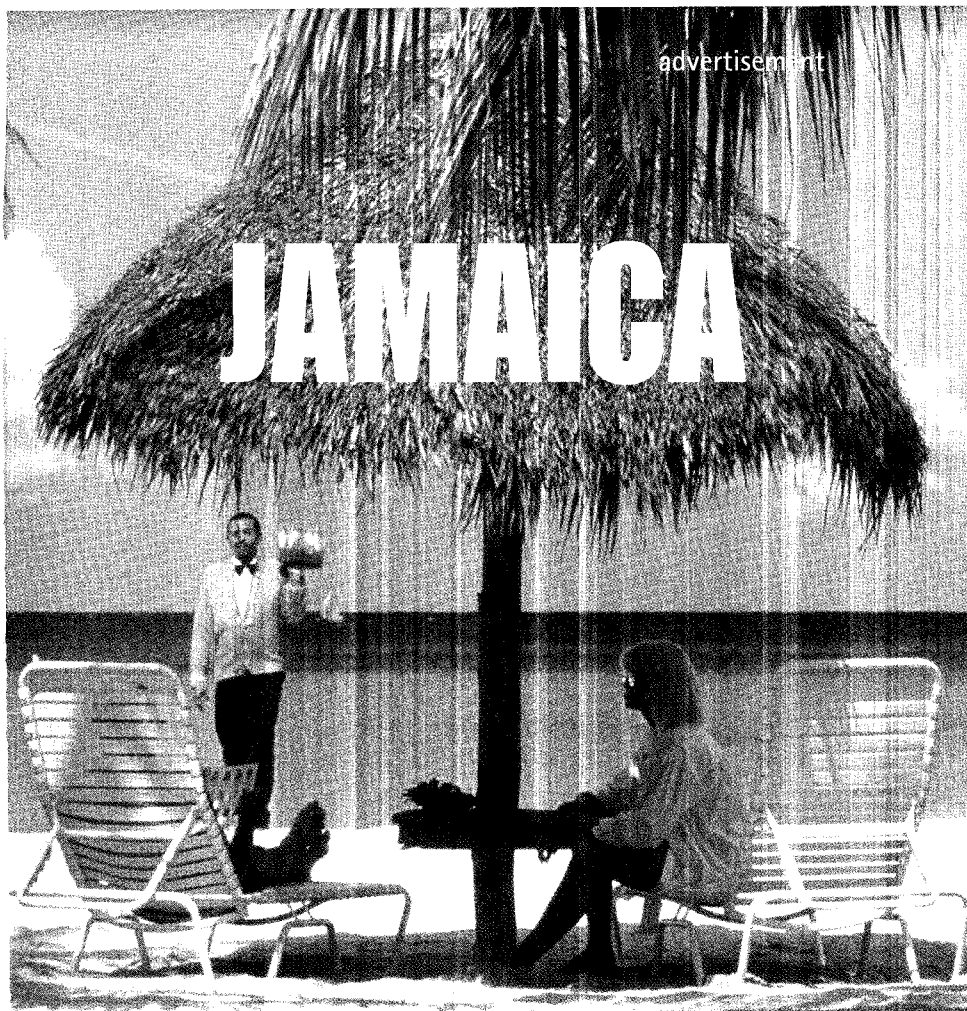
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (360-4321)—Through Jan.
11: "Brazil on Screen." All films are in Portuguese.
Dec. 19 and Dec. 21 at 7: "A Dog's Will" (2000,
Guel Arraes).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-
9480)—Through Dec. 26: "A Wonderful Town:
New York in Film." Dec. 20 at 1: "It Should Happen
to You" (†). ♦ Dec. 20 at 3 and Dec. 23 at 5: "42nd
Street" (1933, Lloyd Bacon). ♦ Dec. 20 at 6 and Dec.
24 at 2: "The Band Wagon" (1953, Vincente Min-
nelli). ♦ Dec. 21 at 2:30: "Trick" (1999, Jim Fall). ♦
Dec. 21 at 6, Dec. 23 at 3, and Dec. 26 at 1: "On the
Town" (1949, Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly). ♦
Dec. 21 at 8 and Dec. 22 at 3: "The Cameraman"
(1928, Edward Sedgwick). ♦ Dec. 22 at 1: "Miracle
on 34th Street" (1947, George Seaton). ♦ Dec. 22 at
5 and Dec. 26 at 3: "Auntie Mame" (1958, Morton
DaCosta). ♦ Dec. 23 at 1: "Lovers and Lollipops"
(1955, Morris Engel and Ruth Orkin). ♦ Through
Jan. 8: "Mauritz Stiller—Restored," a retrospective
of the Swedish director's work. Dec. 27 at 2:30 and
Dec. 29 at 5: "Balletprimadonna" (1916) and "Vin-
garne" (1916). ♦ Dec. 27 at 6 and Dec. 29 at 2: "The
Treasure of Arne" (1919). ♦ Dec. 28 and Dec. 30 at
2:30: "Erotikon" (1920). ♦ Dec. 28 at 6 and Dec. 31
at 2:30: "Johan" (1921). ♦ Dec. 28 at 8 and Dec. 30
at 5: "Gunnar Hedes Saga" (1923).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Dec. 27:
"Spanish Cinema Now." All films are in Spanish.
Dec. 19 at 1, 5, and 9: "The Executioner" (1963,
Luis G. Berlanga). ♦ Dec. 19 at 3 and 7: "The Na-
tional Shotgun" (1978, Berlanga). ♦ Dec. 20 at 1, 5,
and 9: "Letters from Alou" (1990, Montxo Arm-
endáriz). ♦ Dec. 20 at 3 and 7: "Kronen" (1995,
Armendáriz). ♦ Dec. 21 at noon and 6:30 and Dec. 23
at 9: "Masterpiece" (2001, David Trueba). ♦ Dec. 21
at 4:30, Dec. 22 at 9, and Dec. 23 at noon: "Sound
of the Sea" (2001, Bigas Luna). ♦ Dec. 21 at 8:50, Dec.
22 at 4:15, and Dec. 23 at 6:30: "Sex and Lucía"
(2001, Julio Medem). ♦ Dec. 22 at noon; Dec. 23 at
4:30; and Dec. 24 at 1, 5:45, and 7:45: "Savages"
(2001, Carlos Molinero). ♦ Dec. 22 at 2:15: "Luna's
Game" (2001, Mónica Laguna). ♦ Dec. 23 at 2 and
Dec. 26 at 3 and 7:30: "Work in Progress" (2001,
José Luis Guerin). ♦ Dec. 26 at 1 and 5:30 and Dec.
27 at 1, 5:15, and 9:30: "Secrets of the Heart" (1997,
Armendáriz). ♦ Dec. 27 at 3 and 7:20: "Broken Si-
lence" (2001, Armendáriz). ♦ Through Jan. 1: "Fan-
tastika! The Films of Alexandr Prushko," a five-film
retrospective of the Russian special-effects pioneer.
Dec. 28 at 4:30 and 8:30, Dec. 30 at 6, and Jan. 1 at
9: "The Stone Flower" (1946). ♦ Dec. 28 at 6:30,
Dec. 30 at 4 and 8, and Jan. 1 at 1: "Sadko" (1953). ♦
Dec. 29 at 4 and Dec. 31 at 3:45 and 7: "The New
Gulliver" (1935). ♦ Dec. 29 at 5:30 and Dec. 31 at 2,
5:15, and 8:30: "Viy" (1967). ♦ Dec. 29 at 7:30:
"Ruslan i Lyudmila" (1972).



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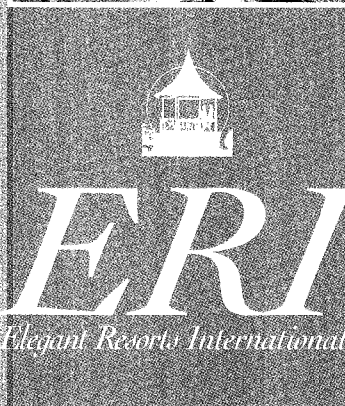
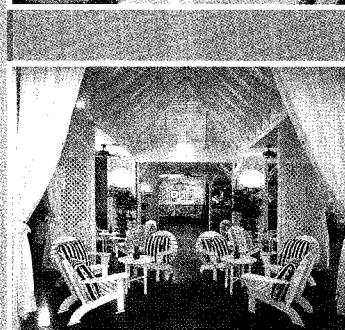
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JAMAICA Happenings

Below is a sampling of events in Jamaica in February. For information on events in Jamaica all year long, call 1-800-233-4562 or visit www.jamaicatravel.com

Polo Tournament (02/02/02 - 02/10/02)

Jamaica Polo Association. Visiting invitational team from England will be at this major polo tournament. Chukka Cove Polo Club, St. Ann.



Festival (02/07/02 - 02/10/02)

Montego Bay Jazz & Blues Festival. Performers include Harry Belafonte, Stephanie Mills, BeBe Wynnans, et al.

Art Exhibition (Until 02/28/02)

Renowned Jamaica artists living in Jamaica and abroad. Exhibition includes painting, photography, sculpture and ceramics. National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston.



Expo (Month of Feb. 2002)

The Hague Agricultural Show, an annual agricultural expo provides fun for the entire family. Crafts and produce. Trelawny.

Sugar Cane Ball (02/16/02)

The Sugar Cane Ball at Round Hill, Montego Bay, has been a major social event for almost 50 years. This very elegant affair in a beautiful setting benefits the Hanover Charities.

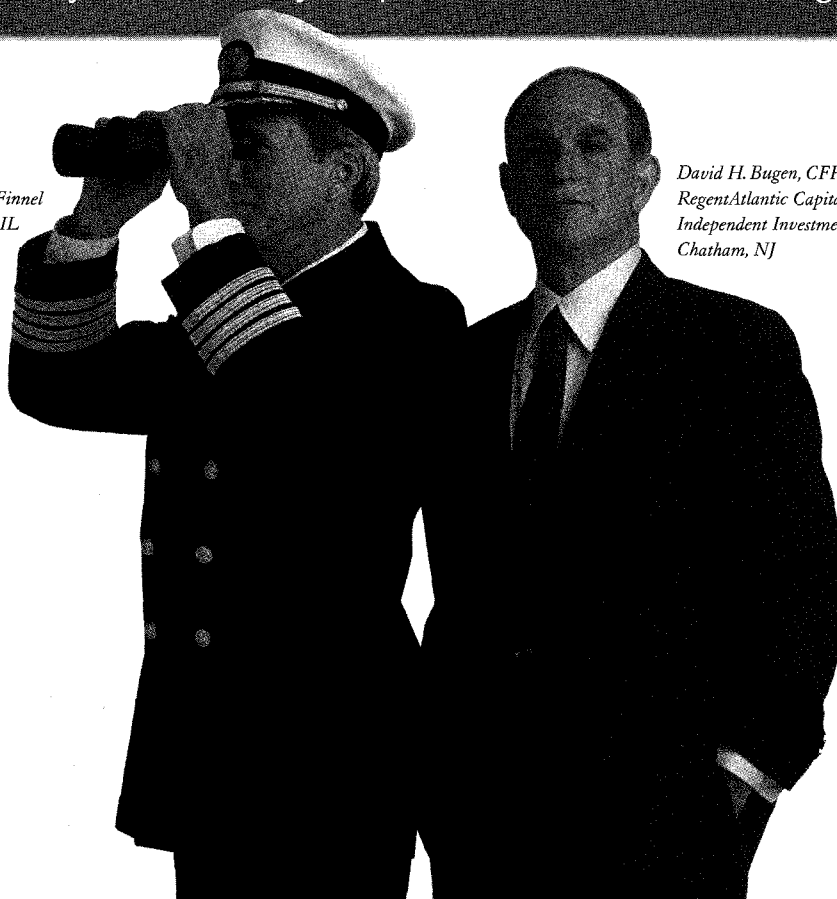
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT RECOUNTED OUT



Is it O.K. to talk about the recount yet? It wasn't the right time on September 10th, because the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center had only just finished organizing the data gleaned from its meticulous examination of a hundred and seventy-five thousand uncounted Florida ballots. It wasn't on September 12th, because the news organizations that had commissioned the study were otherwise occupied. It *was* the right time on November 12th, apparently: that was the day the news organizations got around to publishing their analyses of the results. But, judging from the lack of discussion that has ensued, it abruptly became the wrong time again on November 13th. Maybe it'll never be the right time. But what the hell. Let's talk about it anyway.

The first thing to say about the media recount (its formal name was the Florida Ballots Project) is that it was a praiseworthy endeavor—well designed, unbiased, thorough, and public spirited. The consortium of news organizations—its eight members were the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the Tribune Company, the *Palm Beach Post*, the *St. Petersburg Times*, CNN, and the Associ-

ated Press—did something admirable.

The second thing to say is that the courage that spurred the consortium into existence, a year ago, flagged at the end. Given that the consortium's goal was to catalogue all, or as many as possible, of the votes that had been cast by Florida citizens but not recorded by Florida authorities, one might have expected its members to emphasize the finding that corresponded to its goal. That finding, it turned out, was that, no matter what standard or combination of standards is applied, Al Gore got a handful more votes than George W. Bush. Faced with this conclusion, the consortium changed the question to who would have won if the original statewide recount had not been aborted. The reassuring answer to that question, again by a handful, was Bush.

It soon developed, however, that the news organizations had missed a crucial

detail: if the recount ordered by the Florida Supreme Court had in fact gone forward, the circuit judge supervising it, Terry Lewis, probably would have directed the counting not only of "undervotes" (on which machines could detect no vote) but also of "overvotes" (on which machines detected markings for more than one candidate). The overvotes, according to the consortium's own numbers, would have yielded a hair-breadth victory for Gore. This news was uncovered by the *Orlando Sentinel* (which got its scoop the old-fashioned way: a reporter picked up the phone and called the fellow) and by Michael Isikoff, of *Newsweek*, who found a contemporaneous memo from Lewis confirming what he told the *Sentinel*.

In any case, there is no longer any doubt that more Florida voters *intended* to vote for Gore than for Bush: according to the *Times*, some eight thousand Gore overvotes, net, were lost because of bad design (the notorious "butterfly" of Palm Beach) or confusing instructions (the two-page Duval County "caterpillar" ballot, which directed voters to "vote all pages"). But those votes were irredeemably spoiled, and the consortium did not consider them. In terms of those votes that were arguably valid, Florida—still—is too close to call. In every scenario, the margins are smaller than the five hundred and thirty-seven votes by which Bush officially prevailed—and smaller, too, than the margin of error.

We do know, without question, that the losing candidate outpolled the winning one in the nation at large. In mod-



ern times this was unprecedented, but it had almost happened three times within living memory: in 1960, when J.F.K.'s plurality was barely a hundred thousand votes; in 1968, when Richard Nixon's margin was half a million (about the same as Gore's in 2000); and in 1976, when a geographic shift of twenty thousand votes would have given Gerald Ford an Electoral College victory despite Jimmy Carter's popular majority of 1.7 million. Each of these close calls, as it happens, precipitated a serious bipartisan effort to abolish the Electoral College. In 1969, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a constitutional amendment calling for direct popular election; President Nixon himself endorsed it and a substantial majority of senators favored it, but it was filibustered to death after an epic debate in the Senate. In 1977, President Carter proposed the same idea, and it met the same fate. But at least there was an energetic national discussion, in which most of the participants took it for granted that the election of a President who had lost the popular vote would be in some way an affront to democracy.

The dodged bullets of the sixties and seventies found their target in 2000. Yet no real national discussion ensued. The unthinkable happened, and the almost universal response was to not think about it. The reasons for this are pretty obvious. There are three. First, the Florida imbroglio burned up all the oxygen in which a larger debate might have occurred. "Who won Florida?" became the only issue, obliterating the question of who won America. Second, this time the political legitimacy of an actual, not a hypothetical, President was at stake. After 1960, 1968, and 1976, those seeking to abolish the Electoral College could pursue their aim without the burden of appearing to replay the past as well as reform the future. By the same token, the sitting President could float benignly above the conversation, secure in the knowledge that, however narrowly, he was the people's choice.

The third reason, of course, is September 11th, which extinguished the last traces of any appetite for a discussion that might call into question the legitimacy of a President who has his hands full and who needs, and has, the support of a nation united in the struggle against terror. But by then, it must be said, the

damage to democracy had already been done. Someday, perhaps, our anachronistic system of picking Presidents will be brought into line with the fundamental American idea of political equality among citizens. An unhappy legacy of the election of 2000 is that that day now seems more distant than ever.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

RECRIMINATIONS FALLOUT AT THE RED CROSS



On October 26th, Dr. Bernadine Healy resigned as the president of the American Red Cross, claiming that the board of governors had forced her to leave. The widely accepted explanation for her resignation was that the board, which includes many of America's top corporate executives, had lost confidence in her because of the way she had handled the aftermath of the September 11th emergency. In particular, she was criticized for a plan to divert nearly half the money raised after September 11th (more than six hundred million dollars, as of last week) to a fund for future terrorist-related catastrophes.

Last week, Healy offered her own account of what had happened. Working out of a borrowed office in downtown Washington, she said that she had been forced to resign because she had angered the board of governors by moving too aggressively to address what some see as a legacy of anti-Semitism in the Red Cross. "There's no question about it—this was the one that broke the camel's back," she said.

The issue involves the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which is the Red Cross's international membership body, based in Geneva, and its policy toward the Israeli version of the Red Cross, the Magen David Adom, or the M.D.A. Since 1949, the Israelis, who have only "observer" status with the federation, have been applying for full membership, which would entitle them to vote and to sit on committees. But they have refused to accept as their emblem either the red cross used by most of the world or the

red crescent used by Muslim countries, and the international federation has refused to approve the Israelis' use of the Star of David. Federation officials say that approval of a new emblem would require a majority of the member countries to vote to amend the Geneva convention. Given the tensions in the Middle East, that is not likely to happen soon.

No one, including the Israelis, paid much attention to the issue until Healy took over the Red Cross, in September, 1999. Within weeks, she had become an ardent champion of the M.D.A.'s campaign for membership. In her view, the exclusion of Israel was "hurting the American Red Cross." "Many in the Jewish community, and others, found it shocking," she said. "It was reinforcing a sense that many people had had in the past, since the days of the Holocaust, that there is a discriminatory attitude in the Red Cross, whether that is true or not." (The reputation of the international organization was tainted during the Second World War because it continued to recognize the German Red Cross. Red Cross officials failed to acknowledge



Bernadine Healy

early reports of Jewish death camps, and declined to classify incarcerated Jews as protected prisoners of war. And, after the war, it provided documentation for Nazi fugitives, such as Josef Mengele—unwittingly, according to the Red Cross.)

"I'm a pre-women's-lib woman," said Healy, a fifty-seven-year-old cardiologist who grew up in an Irish-American

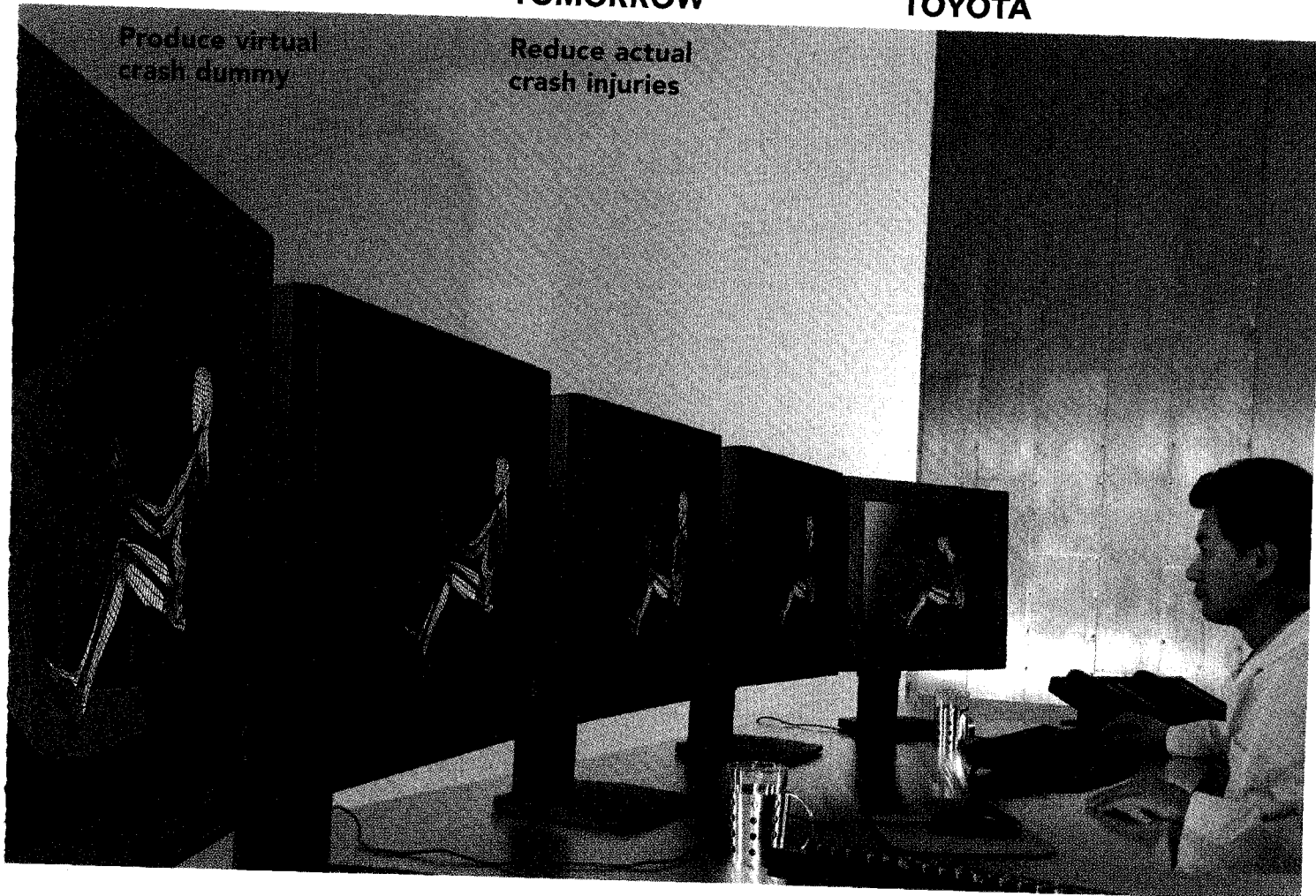
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household in Queens and was educated at Hunter College High School, Vassar, Harvard Medical School, and Johns Hopkins. "I came into a world in which I saw discrimination. I remember Jewish doctors I trained with being unable to practice outside Jewish hospitals."

Former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, whom Healy brought into the Red Cross as a special ambassador on the M.D.A. issue, said last week that his impression was that Healy's championing of the M.D.A. was "the cause" of her being forced out. He went on, "But, totally fortuitously for the Red Cross board, September 11th came along. The board members have done their best to make it look as if they didn't like what she was doing with the money. But she tells me that the board approved everything she did."

Healy's detractors suggest that such a scenario is self-serving. "I think it's a red herring," John Thomas, a former Red Cross official, said. "My friends say she was impossible to work with. And she didn't listen to anyone. She just bulldogged ahead."

Interviews with numerous Red Cross officials suggest that Healy's championing of the M.D.A. was characteristic of how she ran the Red Cross. She was morally passionate and smart in sensing the ramifications of the issue. But she pursued it so single-mindedly, and with so little tact, that she created bitter divisions within the organization.

Eagleburger admits that Healy was

"tough and confrontational" in the M.D.A. fight. "When anyone opposes her, she makes that person seem like the devil incarnate," he said. "I love her for it."

"They're portraying me as a monster because I'm tough," Healy said. "Tough is a badge of honor for a man. But it's a curse for a woman."

Two months after she joined the Red Cross, Healy gave a speech in Geneva excoriating the other members of the international federation for "a betrayal of the sacred principles of this movement" in their policy toward Israel. "This is something we *must* correct, lest the exclusion of Magen David Adom be perceived as partial, biased, discriminatory, or politically driven," she said. The other federation members were said to be furious at what they considered her presumption.

Immediately after the speech, Healy met privately with Cornelio Sommaruga, who was then the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (an affiliated umbrella organization devoted to wartime crises). As Healy recalls it, Sommaruga said, "Let's forget about the niceties. This is terrible. It is a delicate, complicated issue that you don't understand." She says that he warned her, "If I have to admit the Star of David, then I will have to admit the swastika."

When he was reached in Switzerland, Sommaruga objected strenuously to what he felt was Healy's misrepresentation of his remarks. He said he had told her only that many countries wanted to use their own emblems—in-

cluding Sri Lanka, which has, as a sacred national symbol, a swastika with its arms turned backward—but that it was impractical to accommodate them all. "For me, it was one of the most difficult, most offensive meetings I have had in all my thirteen years at the Red Cross. She insulted me," he said, adding that he had supported the M.D.A.'s cause for years.

Eagleburger, for his part, said, "I don't like to throw accusations of anti-Semitism around, because people are often accused of it too easily. But I have to tell you, the attitude within the Red Cross community in Geneva is like what you'd run into years ago trying to join a posh country club, like 'It's just not done.' I felt like the Man Who Came to Dinner."

To increase the pressure on the international federation, Healy persuaded the board of the American Red Cross to withhold from the federation its annual dues of five million dollars. Apparently, a heated debate about whether to continue withholding these dues preceded Healy's resignation. On October 3rd, the charity's executive committee voted to consider a motion to restore the dues. Healy was asked to leave the room. Half an hour later, she noticed the members leaving. She asked what they had decided, but several members refused to tell her, she says. "It passed," one finally admitted. Then, in front of her staff, Healy berated the committee members, demanding that they go back in and reverse themselves. "Do you understand?" she asked them. "This is a governing crisis. You can't do this!" Healy learned later that the board thought her outburst had verged on "insubordination." "They accused me of screeching," she said. "I don't even know how to screech! My voice gets deeper when I'm angry. Have you ever heard anything more sexist?"

A senior adviser to the Red Cross said, "I heard she was very impolitic. They didn't think she was the kind of woman they wanted as president of the Red Cross." Three weeks later, Healy was out.

American Red Cross officials downplay the M.D.A. fight as a factor in their disillusionment with Healy. David McLaughlin, the chairman of the board of governors, said that it was but one of "a whole series of issues" that caused the board to lose confidence in her. The officials also note that in the end the full board voted to continue withhold-



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ing dues. But how long that will last is anyone's guess: William Usher, a federation official, said that the policy is still under review.

"I'm a physician," Healy said. "I see a problem, I diagnose it, and I treat it. I'd say the Red Cross isn't a healthy culture. But its members don't really want change. They're not comfortable with laying the issues on the table and confronting them in an analytical way. It's surface congeniality."

—Jane Mayer

EXTRACURRICULAR DEPT. WIZARDS IN TRAINING



Any good teacher knows the importance of keeping up with the latest pedagogical advances, and this is no less true among teachers of wizardry than among teachers of math or geography. Last Monday morning, eight teachers of Wizardry 101, which is offered in the after-school programs of several New York elementary schools, gathered for a teacher-training session at the Ensemble Studio Theatre, on West Fifty-second Street. The class was led by Kevin O'Keefe, who is the artistic director of Circus Minimus, an organization that teaches groups of children around the country how to create their own circuses.

O'Keefe explained that he had started teaching wizardry in order to tap into the imaginative powers of children while also giving them solid circus skills. "At a certain point, I asked myself, 'Do I really need to teach another tumbling class?'" he said. Selling school administrators and kids on Wizardry 101 had, O'Keefe acknowledged, been made easier by the popularity of Harry Potter, but he reminded the teachers that wizardry has an ancient history. "To me, Harry Potter is just the latest pop-culture take on something that has been around since we crawled out of caves," he said.

There is no formula for a successful wizardry class, O'Keefe told his students. He asked Damaris Cozza, who teaches at Brooklyn Friends and P.S. 11 and who belongs to the imaginative-play school of wizardry, to explain how she conducts

her classes. "I start by turning off the lights—that's a sign that we've entered the magic forest," Cozza said. "Then the children lie down on the floor, and I tell them to imagine their bodies flying out of the window, out of the school, through the clouds. I tell them that their fingers and toes are now feathers or claws. Every child is basically the same week to week, though sometimes they change slightly—like maybe this week they want rainbow feathers and last week they had pink sparkly feathers." Each member of Cozza's class has a magical name of his or her own choosing—Ice Man, say, or Fluffinator—and each child also makes a wand, hiding inside it a slip of paper bearing a secret that only the child knows. "I am really into secrets," O'Keefe said, with enthusiasm.

Another wizardry teacher, Sean Fagan, who joined Circus Minimus after two years of juggling, stilt walking, and clowning for Ringling Bros., explained that his classes hewed more to traditional magic, though he had found Harry Potter to be a rich resource. His class at St. Luke's had devised a version of Quidditch, the ball game that is the sport of choice at Hogwarts, J. K. Rowling's fictional wizardry academy. He passed around a handmade Golden Snitch—the ball with which a game of Quidditch can be decisively won. It was a gold-painted Wiffle ball with white rubber wings. Fagan had also adopted, from "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban," the concept of the Boggarts: creatures that take the shape of people's fears. "I opened a can of worms in the first class this semester when I asked the kids what they were afraid of and they said things like 'People falling out of buildings,' after September 11th," Fagan said. "I was expecting them to say spiders and cockroaches. I'm not a psychologist, and I didn't want to get into something I'm not prepared for. I'm a mirthmaker." Fagan added that he was proud that the class took ten minutes to talk about one allergic child's fear of peanuts.

The session concluded with Fagan and another wizardry teacher, Paul Kelly, demonstrating magic that teachers could use in their own classrooms: a cut-and-restored-paper trick, a variant of three-card monte, a mind-reading routine. Afterward, the teachers mingled and ex-

changed tips. Sean Fagan was inspired by Damaris Cozza's innovative wand usage, which he thought he might draw upon next semester in his class at Ethical Culture School. This semester's students were about to demonstrate their wizardry skills in front of an audience of parents. "We're calling the show 'Muggle Magic,'" Fagan said, using Rowling's term for ordinary humans. "Some of the tricks will come off well, and some will come off badly. But that's O.K., because we're Muggles, we're not wizards. The kids want to believe in magic, but, at the same time, they're realists."

—Rebecca Mead

ON THE BLOCK A NIGHT AT THE BERESFORD

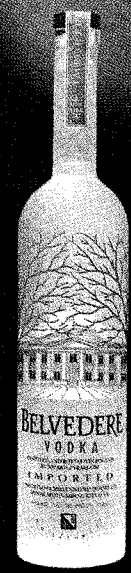


If you had wandered into last week's holiday party in the lobby of the Beresford—the palatial, three-towered apartment building that broods over Central Park West—you might have thought that (a) someone had pulled the fire alarm or that (b) *Catch a Rising Star* had reopened and moved to a better address. In fact, firefighters from Engine Company 74 and Ladder Company 25, stationed nearby, had been invited to this year's private gathering to take part in an auction of goods and services donated by Beresford residents—with the proceeds going to the families of firefighters killed on September 11th. The m.c. was Jerry Seinfeld, who lives in a duplex on the E-F elevator line. "It's a thrill to perform in the building," Seinfeld told the crowd. "I was at Carnegie Hall a few months ago and, frankly, I didn't like it—it was too far away."

After thanking the firemen for coming ("There's not as much asbestos in this building as we would have liked"), Seinfeld introduced the first item, a colorful Japanese silk coat called a haori. "This is a lovely coat—I don't know how warm it is," he said. "It can be worn by a man or a woman—south of Fourteenth Street."

He started the bidding at a hundred dollars, and quickly ratcheted it up to two seventy-five. "Come on, so far it's only people on the E and F line. You on the G and H line—aren't you embarrassed?"

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So what if you have a smaller lobby?"

The coat went for five hundred dollars, and Seinfeld moved on to a mink scarf ("These minks were former residents of the building—not on the E and F line, but I hear it was a wonderful studio—so it's completely humane") and dinner with the former United Nations



Jerry Seinfeld

Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and his wife, Kati Marton ("These are intelligent people, unlike yourselves—maybe you'll learn something").

"Now we have a twenty-minute procedure called Somnoplasty, which uses low-power, low-temperature radio-frequency energy to help treat and reduce snoring," Seinfeld announced at one point. "There are a lot of old Jews in the building, so this should be a hotly contested item. The procedure was donated and will be performed—don't you love it when they say 'performed,' like it's a show?—by Dr. Daniel S. Arick. He's not actually a doctor, but he says he knows what to do. Do I hear two hundred dollars—for our fire guys—to get some sort of microphone shoved up your nose and have your wife like you again?"

Tony Randall's wife, Heather, who had organized the event, won the procedure with a bid of eleven hundred dollars, prompting Seinfeld to mutter, "You've

got to admire the honesty," and providing a segue to the next item: Tony Randall's services as a butler. "He will not be sleeping—he'll be awake for all the butlering he has to do," Seinfeld promised, holding up a publicity shot of Randall. "There he is, in 'Pillow Talk.' That's from—what?—1929. Don't worry, if you win him we'll take him there. There won't be any problems with the directions. And no one at your party will be able to tell he doesn't know who you are."

Randall's skills as a manservant were purchased for three thousand dollars by John McEnroe, whom Seinfeld described as "the most famous Beresford resident until I got here."

At the end of the evening, which raised more than fifty thousand dollars, Heather Randall called the firemen up to the stage, where they received a standing ovation. Vicky Gold Levi, of the E and F line, picked up the microphone and said, "I saw a thing on Fox News last night that said firemen have been voted the sexiest men in America." One of the guys from Engine Company 74 grabbed a comrade, pushed him forward, and called out, "Who'll give five hundred dollars for Chris Healy?"

—Adam Green

ON THE SIDELINES CLEATS, DATES, AND GOATS



During Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, if a man can't get home for *iftar*, the meal that breaks the daily sunrise-to-sunset fast, he can stop in a mosque to eat. Often, following the example of the prophet Muhammad, he'll start with a single date and a glass of water. But if a Muslim doesn't want to go home right away after, say, three hours of soccer, then a sports drink and a cigarette on the sidelines will do.

It was late afternoon on an unusually warm fall day in Prospect Park, and a handful of men who had just finished playing were sitting on the grass behind their makeshift goal. "I've lost some weight this Ramadan, maybe five pounds," Salle Colagi, a stocky forty-year-old computer-networking engineer from Yemen, said. He lifted his jersey

and took a piece of flesh in his fist. "But back in my village I might lose fifteen pounds during the whole month. That's not from soccer, just from fasting."

"In Egypt, everyone gains weight," Said El-Deeb, a medical student from Alexandria, said. "You sit in a café until midnight and then you go to friends' houses and eat till two in the morning or later. Then you sleep some and wake up before sunrise to have some cheese or yogurt to get you through the day."

"Yeah, it's a well-known rule," Hafid Elbroji, a thirty-one-year-old from Casablanca, Morocco, said. "In the Muslim world, Muslims gain weight, but when they're living in the States they lose weight. Over there unemployment is so high that a lot of people, especially young guys, sit around all day playing cards and thinking about food."

Shafeeq Muhammad, a thirty-two-year-old Bronx-born New Yorker of Dominican descent, became a Muslim a decade ago. "I knew I wanted to convert," he said, "but Ramadan was coming up and, frankly, I didn't know if I could make it through the fast, so I waited until after Ramadan. Now I'm so gung-ho I usually fast for an extra week or so after Eid al-Fitr."

Eid al-Fitr, which began last weekend, is the three-day feast that ends Ramadan. "Sweets, nuts, dried fruits, a cake layered with honey," Collagi said. "Maybe for a main course you have some lamb. In my village, you'd have a goat, but there aren't a lot of goats in New York."

"Astoria," one of the players, a Greek, said. "When it was a Greek neighborhood, there were goats all over the place."

An Arab player pointed out that, since a lot of Arabs now live in Astoria, there ought to be goats there, too, but no one in Brooklyn, it seemed, knew whether there were goats in Queens anymore. The park was getting darker, and cell phones were starting to ring: wives, girlfriends, and parents reminding the men to pick something up for *iftar*. On the next field over, a group of Muslim girls in dark dresses and head scarves were playing softball. Their mothers were calling to them from behind the backstop, letting them know that it was time to get home. A girl stood at the plate with a bat in her hands, not quite ready to call it quits.

—Lee Smith

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LETTER FROM AFGHANISTAN

CITY OF DREAMS

A peace of sorts comes to Kabul.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

The tomb of Ahmed Shah Massoud, the assassinated Defense Minister of the Northern Alliance, is in a shallow cave burrowed into a hill in the Panjshir Valley. The grave site, which is near the edge of a crude road cut along the steep valley slopes, is marked by a green sign with hand lettering that spells out "Chief of the Martyr's Hill" in Dari and in English. The Panjshir Valley—a canyon some hundred and twenty miles long, stretching southwest from northern Afghanistan to the Shamali plains just north of Kabul—is a bleakly rugged place. The road often falls away or is narrowed by mud slides, and ruined Soviet-era military tanks and armored personnel carriers litter the route, along with the twisted carcasses of trucks and jeeps that have slipped off the road onto the rocks below.

Massoud was born in Bazarak, a village less than a mile up the Panjshir River from Martyr's Hill. His widow and six children still live there. He was a national hero long before he was murdered, on September 9th, and he has since become a figure of quasi-religious dimensions. Travelling down the valley toward Kabul at the beginning of December with several other journalists, I noticed that my driver, Enam, who is a native Panjshiri, had tied a black flag of mourning to the antenna of our jeep. There was a Massoud poster plastered to the windshield, practically obscuring it, and a small photograph of Massoud taped onto the driver's-side window. We were part of a convoy of seventeen vehicles, many of which were decorated in a similar fashion.

It had taken us four days to travel about two hundred and fifty miles—south from the city of Taloqan, through the Hindu Kush, and into the Panjshir Valley—across an isolated, edgy region where the Northern Alliance seemed to have only a tenuous presence. On the second day, we came at dusk to Saleh Deh, a town in a mountainous district that is infamous for its bandits. Enam

whispered that last year he had been part of a large convoy of trucks that stopped there, and had overheard men talking in the bazaar about how they planned to rob and kill everyone. We didn't stay in Saleh Deh. About an hour later, Enam flipped the jeep onto its side while trying to negotiate an uneven stretch of road, and soon after we got the vehicle upright and moved out again we were stopped by five men with AK-47 assault rifles. Our guards convinced them that it would be a bad idea to kill so many foreigners.

On the fourth day, the sun was setting on Massoud's grave as we made our way toward the paved road that crosses the plain to Kabul. Once we were on the road, our headlights illuminated blasted vehicles, ruined tanks, collapsed houses, and broken walls covered with starbursts from shellfire and pocked by bullets. After the Taliban took Kabul, in 1996, they destroyed all the villages in the Shamali, emptying the area of civilians and creating a buffer zone for their front line with the Northern Alliance, which forayed out from the Panjshir. In the weeks leading up to the Taliban's retreat from Kabul, in mid-November, the front-line positions had been heavily pounded by American bombers and warplanes, and the road was gouged and cratered. Enam drove slowly and weaved around the holes, but was careful not to go too close to the edge of the road. Newly posted signs warned of land mines.

Kabul appeared out of the night, shockingly, as we reached the top of a small cluster of hills that rose from the plain. There was light everywhere. Glowing squares and rectangles of white, blue, and yellow crossed the valley. It was the first Afghan city I had seen with a functioning electrical system.

With the Taliban gone, Kabul has reverted to being the one city in Afghanistan where, in relative terms, almost anything goes. Liquor is still for-

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bidden and scarce, but it's available. Street vendors sell postcards of sultry Indian screen idols, and cockfights have resumed. Metalworkers are doing a brisk business in satellite dishes, which are hand-beaten from scrap; the finished products are covered with the logos and brand names of canned goods, making them look like Pop art. The cult of Massoud is also flourishing. Throngs of young men scuffled for tickets to the première of a French documentary, "Massoud l'Afghan," and an official morning of homage was held recently at several of Kabul's main mosques. Northern Alliance soldiers laden with Massoud posters tucked them under the windshield wipers of cars, like parking tickets.

Yet there seems to be an underlying uncertainty about the changes that have taken place so suddenly. A British reporter and I were walking around downtown one morning, and we stopped on a street where there were several washing-machine and appliance-repair shops. My companion decided to interview a twelve-year-old boy who was working as a repairman. A group of curious men

and boys soon surrounded us, and I noticed that four women in blue burkhas had paused to watch as well, from a short distance away. After a few minutes, the women came forward, and one of them, who said her name was Shahkoko and that she was forty-five years old, asked if we knew of any foreign aid agencies or N.G.O.s that needed English-speaking Afghan personnel. She had once been a teacher, she said, and under the Taliban had continued teaching, clandestinely, in her home, to help her family survive. But she had been discovered, and the Taliban had detained her teen-age son, beaten him, and cut him with knives. So she had stopped giving her illegal classes. But now she was desperate to find real, paying work again. I took down her name, and two men who were listening helped me sort out some confusion over her street address.

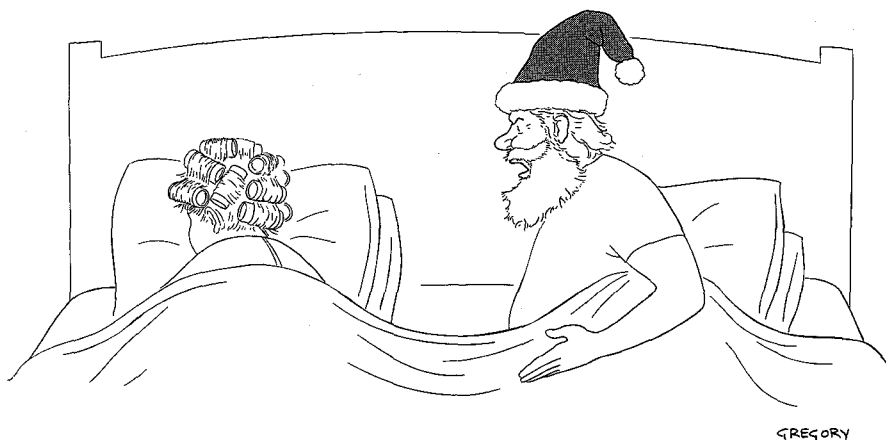
Suddenly, we were interrupted by an irascible bearded man who owned one of the shops. He yelled at Yama, my translator, who is from northern Afghanistan. The bearded man was a Pashtun—a member of the tribal group that most of the Taliban are also from—and he exco-

riated Yama for helping foreigners talk to Afghan women. Yama was a yokel from Badakhshan province, he said, which was an insulting reference to Yama's Tajik heritage. This upset Yama, who tried to pull me away, but by then I was angry, and I cursed the man and called him a "Talib." Shahkoko, the former teacher, nodded her head vigorously. "Thank you," she whispered. "You are right, he is a Talib." Then she and her friends moved quickly down the street, away from us and the little mob scene. My companions and I went in the opposite direction, leaving the shopkeeper blustering on the pavement. Yama chastised me for my outburst. "You cannot talk this way in Kabul yet," he said. "It is not safe for you. There are still many people here who think like the Taliban do."

It must be strange for many of the citizens of Kabul to be dealing with Western expectations when until only a few weeks ago the only foreigners in the city—or in the country, for that matter—were the Pakistanis, Chechens, Uzbeks, and Arabs fighting alongside the Taliban and Osama bin Laden's Al



This section of Kabul, which looks like a giant sand castle now, once had busy hotels and shops. Photograph by Thomas Dworzak.



*"Stop avoiding me. I know when you are sleeping.
I know when you're awake."*

Qaeda organization. They have all vanished, and in their place are several hundred journalists from all over the world, who have packed the city's few hotels, rented scores of cars, and hired numerous translators. On the curb outside the Herat Restaurant, a kebab-and-rice-pilaf place whose walls are adorned with old black-and-white photographs of Afghanistan's principal ancient sites (except for the destroyed Bamian Buddhas, which are curiously absent, as if they had never existed), a contingent of beggar boys and women in dirty burkhas are on permanent stakeout. The Herat is said to have been the favorite dining spot of the foreign Taliban in the capital, before the journalists came.

In the residential district of Wazir Akbar Khan, where carefully laid-out tree-lined streets and public parks recall a time when Kabul was almost a modern city, workmen are busy repainting and restoring dilapidated houses for media organizations. There is a *Newsweek* house, a *New York Times* house, and an ABC and CBS house. A British journalist who is setting up a Kabul office for his television news agency has rented a house in which one of Osama bin Laden's wives used to live. The United Nations has resumed its operations, as have a number of international relief agencies, and foreign embassies are re-opening. The Russians, British, Iranians, Turks, French, and Germans were among the first to come back, and in mid-December a group of American marines went into the United States

Embassy compound, which had been closed since 1989. The marines swept the grounds for unexploded ordnance and set up machine-gun nests behind sandbags on the roof.

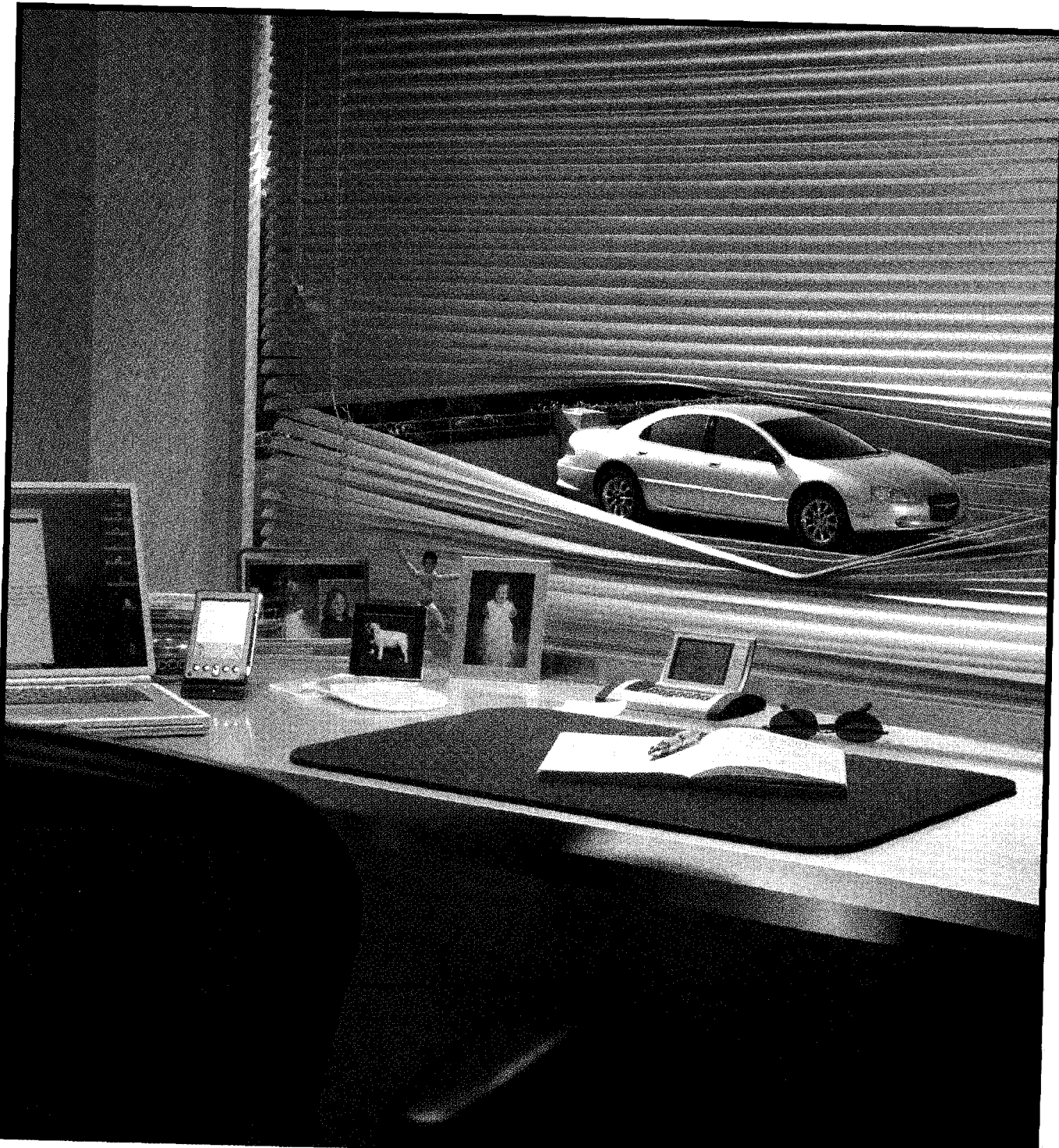
A single concrete office tower rises some eighteen stories above the city center. It is the Telecommunications Ministry, Kabul's tallest building, and perhaps the last vestige of the days when Afghanistan seemed to have some kind of future. Architecturally, it is as though time had stopped in Kabul in the late seventies. Nothing much appears to have been constructed since then, except for one half-finished bank building and a mosque, both begun under the Taliban.

A great deal has been destroyed. One day while I was driving around the city with Fridoun, an affable twenty-three-year-old medical student, I remarked that he was born just about the time that the war against the Communists began—the jihad that was followed by civil war. "Yes," he said. "All I know is war. For me, rockets and bombings—all these things are normal." He shrugged. He was eager for Kabul's medical school to reopen, so that he could finish his studies and become a doctor. As we drove along the Kabul River, which has for several years been nearly bone dry because of a drought, and began to circle the city, the scale of the destruction was overwhelming. Entire sections of Kabul have been obliterated. Block after block of buildings is a dismal ruin of bricks and twisted concrete; roofs have caved

in, façades are full of bullet holes or have been pierced by tank shells. Fridoun explained what had caused each piece of devastation, and after a while it seemed as though we were examining the city the way one assesses the age of a dead tree by counting the rings in its stump.

Fridoun pointed out the beat-up tomb of King Nadir Shah—the father of Zahir Shah, who is now in exile in Rome—on a large dirt hill not far away. The hill was honeycombed with abandoned dugouts and fortifications, and sparsely adorned with martyrs' flags. It had been the front line in the fighting over Kabul that began in 1992, when President Burhanuddin Rabbani and Massoud took power. The ruined buildings, lone walls, and solitary columns below the hill resembled giant sand castles or sections of an archeological dig. "This area used to be very famous as a place of business for people coming in from the provinces," Fridoun said. "There were many hotels and shops." Now several ragged men and children were selling scrap metal and recycled spare parts for cars; bicycle repairmen sat on boxes at the roadside next to inner tubes, waiting for customers.

Fridoun said that Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pashtun Muslim fundamentalist backed by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (and, during the anti-Soviet jihad in the nineteen-eighties, by the C.I.A.), had established a base in the mountains fringing the city beyond the hill, and from there he was able to rain rockets on the population, which he did with vicious abandon. Massoud was at first assisted in the defense of the city by the Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum (who recaptured the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif from the Taliban a few weeks ago). Dostum had fought with the Soviets against the mujahideen until 1992, when he switched sides, thereby facilitating Massoud's seizure of Kabul. Dostum switched sides again in 1994. From the same hill where he had fought with Massoud against Hekmatyar, Dostum now turned his guns against Massoud. Then the Taliban attacked Hekmatyar and Dostum from behind. They retreated, and Massoud faced the Taliban and another mujahideen faction, the Hazara, who were entrenched in western Kabul, around the university. "What



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people say," Fridoun explained, "is that Massoud told the Taliban, 'Let's join together and finish the Hazara.'" In any case, he said, the Taliban began fighting with the Hazara, killed their leader, and Massoud chased them out of the city. "Then," Fridoun continued, "Massoud attacked the Taliban."

Fridoun went on in this manner as we drove into the devastated western suburbs, and I stopped trying to keep track of the precise chronology of what destruction was caused when and by whom. The result, in the end, was the same. All of the devastation had a name attached to it, and most of the names were still key figures in Afghanistan's politics. As we passed the former Russian Cultural Center, Fridoun pointed across the road to a large building that had been peppered by gunfire. "This was where the Hazara killed their prisoners when they were in control here. They killed them by shooting, by *halal*, as we say"—Fridoun drew an imaginary knife across his throat—"by fire, by boiling water, and even by driving nails into heads."

I asked Fridoun how he felt about showing me the ruins. "I feel ashamed," he replied. "I feel ashamed that a foreign person sees this and thinks: This was destroyed by Afghans themselves." Then what did he think about the men who had done this, men who were still wielding power? "We know this is their last chance to be here with guns," he said softly. "If there are elections in Afghanistan for a new government, none of these people will be voted for. The people are very angry with these men. Right now, I know, if I say 'Massoud is bad' in Kabul, I will go to prison. But if democracy comes I can say who is bad and who is good, and I can vote for whoever I want to lead Afghanistan."

Professor Muhammad Kazem Ahung is a writer and intellectual who stayed in the city during most of the years of turmoil. He received me in his home, a drab, two-story concrete-and-glass house with a walled garden. It must have been a comfortable, upper-middle-class residence once, but now it was freezing cold inside, and there seemed to be no furniture. Ahung apologized for this, indicating that I should sit on some cushions arranged around a frayed carpet. There was nothing on the walls of the

house, either upstairs or downstairs. It seemed to have been stripped bare except for the floor coverings.

Professor Ahung is a robust man of sixty-eight, but—unusual for an Afghan—he appears younger. He has a neatly trimmed salt-and-pepper beard, and on the day we met he was wearing a woollen waistcoat over a traditional Afghan long shirt and pantaloons. He speaks excellent English, and since he was clearly uncomfortable in the presence of the translator I had brought—a young Panjshiri named Qias, who has relatives who are officers in the Northern Alliance—I asked Qias to go to the bazaar to buy some fruit. Professor Ahung relaxed and brought me tea and biscuits, even though he was observing Ramadan.

Ahung grew up on a farm on the Shamali plains, where his father, who was an Army officer, had retired to live on the land and grow grapes. He went to Kabul University and graduated from the Academy of Letters in 1958, then began working in the Ministry of Information and Culture. He became chief of the reporting staff of the government's official daily gazette, and in 1963 he went to East Lansing, Michigan, where he earned an M.A. in journalism at Michigan State. When he returned to Kabul, he was promoted to assistant chief editor, but in 1966 he was fired, he says, because he had been accused of being a member of the Afghan Communist Party. "I am a socialist by inclination, not an extremist," Ahung said. "Not like these people"—he motioned to the world outside the windows of his house. He spoke with warmth of his two years in the United States, and of the time immediately afterward, back home in Kabul, when he was an avid visitor at the United States Information Service library. "In those days, the Western press was very well represented here," he said. "The library had copies of *Time*, *Life*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, the *London Illustrated News*. We read everything, and

I translated many articles for Afghan readers."

Ahung continued to work as a writer for the Ministry of Information, and he also began teaching journalism classes at Kabul University: "I taught reporting, and English as a second language, a course designed for journalists." In 1973, the King was overthrown in a bloodless coup by his cousin, Muhammad Daoud, and five years later Daoud was killed by Marxist military officers and replaced by Nur Muhammad Taraki. At this point, Ahung's journalistic career took off again. "Since I had some really close personal friends who were involved in the revolution," he said, "they proposed to Taraki that I become head of the *Kabul Times*." Taraki agreed, and Ahung stayed on as editor when Taraki was murdered by his deputy, Hafizullah Amin, who was, in turn, murdered by Babrak Karmal, the leader of a rival Communist faction.

Babrak Karmal came to power in 1979, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and he fired Ahung from the *Kabul Times*. Ahung retreated, once again, to Kabul University, where he taught and wrote articles and books. He was the dean of the journalism school for twelve years. He had written more than twenty books, he said, although most were no longer in print. He remained at the university until the Taliban purged the school of those who were not appropriately Islamicized. Since then, he had tried to keep busy. He had even written a number of short stories. He showed me a book that was published this year in Pakistan. I barely recognized him in the photograph on the jacket. He had a long beard, grown to appease the Taliban.

I asked Ahung what had kept him going. "I'll tell you," he said. "Whenever the regime in power thought I felt this way or that, contrary to their way of thinking, they usually just fired me and I went home and said nothing. I shut up. I became a conservative! That is how I survived." Hadn't this self-censorship been difficult? I asked him. He pondered a moment. "Well, no," he said. "If I had shouted, they would have put me in jail, and what would have been the use of that? If I was ousted from my country, what could I do? Who could I help in places where the people are better edu-



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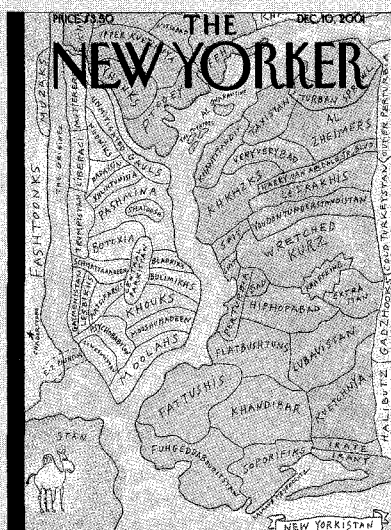
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cated than myself? I could have gone to Iran or Pakistan, but the Iranians look down on Afghans for reasons of language and culture. And the Pakistanis, they are businessmen, in every sense of the word—you know what I mean." Ahung blames the Communists for having begun the destruction of Afghanistan. "Before, economically and culturally, and in terms of social equality, we were making progress. But this was destroyed by the Communists. I was among them, but I did not want that."

Ahung seemed to have few illusions about his pragmatism and its costs. "Spiritually and intellectually, I did not feel particularly proud about things," he said. "Materially, I was just able to sustain myself and my family. Meanwhile, I encouraged others not to be conservative like me. I encouraged them, my students and my sons, to fight for their beliefs. But I had students who spied upon me. They have called me treacherous," he said indignantly. "They have."

Professor Ahung and his wife live alone in the house in Kabul. "I'm getting old," he said. "I have five sons and three daughters and twenty-four grandchildren. They are all independent and live away from here." His three daughters are married and live in Herat with their husbands. Three of his five sons went to the former Soviet Union to study and have not returned. A fourth son followed them there, and the fifth works for an international relief agency in Herat. His wife—whom I never saw, although I heard her rustling around in an adjacent room occasionally—missed the children, and he tried not to be away from the house for long, so that she wouldn't be alone. "Of course I feel sorrow," he said. "But what I do is I sit with myself, and I say, 'Throw it out of your mind.' And it works, you know, it goes." He had not yet been asked to resume his duties when the university reopens next spring. "With all due respect," he said, "I am not going to ask. I am not going to sacrifice my pride. I have no money. I have sold all of my carpets, my dishes, and my wife's gold in order to survive these past six years. My house and farm in Shamali, which used to give us some small income, was burned down. They should come to see me, for my pride."

I asked Ahung how he felt about things now, with the Taliban gone and

political change in the air. "I am disturbed," he said. The previous evening he had listened to the fundamentalist mujahideen leader Abdul Rasul Sayyaff speak at a nearby mosque. The Afghan delegates who had met in Bonn to establish an interim government in Kabul had just announced who would be in the new administration, and Sayyaff and other conservative Afghan leaders were angry at not being given posts. "Sayyaff said that if the U.S.-supported interim government came and the king returned, guerrilla war would begin again in Afghanistan," Professor Ahung said. "This disturbs me."

The Bonn agreement was a victory for the Massoud loyalists. Muhammad Fahim, who became the Northern Alliance's Defense Minister after Massoud's assassination, kept his job in the new government, as did Massoud's close friend Abdullah Abdullah, the Foreign Minister, and Yunis Qanouni, the Interior Minister. All of them, like Massoud, grew up in the Panjshir Valley. President Rabbani, who is an ethnic Tajik from a northeastern province, had to relinquish his office to Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun from a prominent family in Kandahar. In a few months, a *loya jirga*, a traditional assembly of various Afghan groups, is to meet and choose a more permanent government. "We all know that if the U.S. had not bombed this country looking for Osama bin Laden," Professor Ahung said, "we would not have an interim government. As an American, you should feel responsible for this whole thing, and for Afghanistan, because if you leave there will be a civil war, and it will be worse than ever before."

The Afghan Presidential palace is in the sprawling, park-like nineteenth-century royal compound in downtown Kabul. The grounds of the complex are unkempt now, and the roofs of several buildings have caved in, apparently because they were hit by rockets, or perhaps tank fire. I went there to speak to President Rabbani's eldest son, Salahuddin, whom I had met several weeks earlier at his father's home in the city of Faizabad. Salahuddin has lived in London for several years, but he returned to Afghanistan after Massoud's assassination, and he accompanied his father to Kabul when the Taliban left. I waited for

him in a room that had a huge gray metal Soviet-era intercom system that was clumsily inscribed with Cyrillic lettering. It clashed with the crystal chandelier, heavy curtains, Persian carpets, and gilded furniture. Salahuddin greeted me in the private Presidential meeting room. It was the first time, he said, he had talked to someone there, and he seemed to be enjoying himself. The room was dark and cold, but there was a small, Russian-made electric heater in the corner that made it bearable.

Salahuddin is thirty, and is married to an Afghan woman from a Pashtun family whom he met in Pakistan. They have two children. He said that he had not been back to London since September, and that he hoped his family would join him in Afghanistan, perhaps next summer. Salahuddin was diplomatic about the new government and about his father's position. "I'd say that my father is not angry," he said, "but that he is not entirely happy, either." They approved of Hamid Karzai as the new leader, but would have liked what Salahuddin described as broader representation for other members of the Northern Alliance. He shrugged and smiled. "I think there was pressure for a quick fix in Afghanistan, and you know that no such thing is possible here."

I asked Salahuddin what he thought was going to happen. "All I can tell you is that my father is ready to hand over power," he said. "But as for the rest I cannot say." A Northern Alliance security official who had been very close to Massoud had told me privately that the day after the Bonn agreement was announced, General Fahim became so angry about Rabbani's complaints that he threatened to arrest him. Fahim backed down, but he told Rabbani to stay in his residence and to shut up. Fahim had also issued some kind of ultimatum to General Dostum, and, coincidentally or not, several days later Dostum told reporters that he had no intention of spilling blood over his differences with the new government.

Salahuddin said he had hoped that the U.N. would not attempt to impose a disarmament process, and in fact that possibility had been left out of the final text of the Bonn agreement. "What do you think," Salahuddin said, "that the Blue Helmets would be able to come

and say to the people, 'Give me your gun'? The gun is more than about power and survival; to Afghans having a gun is a source of pride. You can't just take them away. So this is impossible in Afghanistan." He had also been troubled by the preliminary language for one of the clauses of the agreement, which he described as calling for justice against perpetrators of past atrocities. "This is a real problem," he said. "How to define atrocities. There are many commanders who have killed people who might fear that they could now be considered war criminals. Our soldiers have killed a lot of Taliban. Does that constitute an atrocity?" This argument prevailed in Bonn, and the final version of the pact doesn't address retribution.

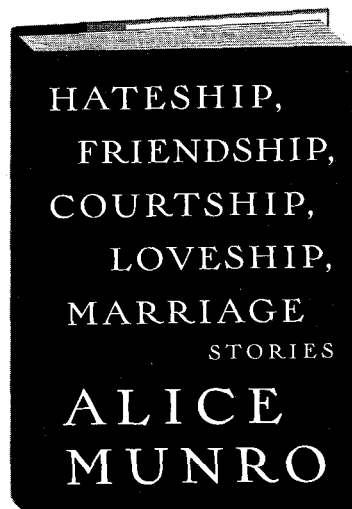
After we had chatted awhile, Salahuddin said, rather abruptly, "Now I have a question for you. What is your opinion of my prospects for a political future here in Afghanistan?" In Faizabad, people had referred to Salahuddin—although not in his presence—as "the Vice-President," and I had once told him so. He had laughed then, and looked pleased. Now it was less of a joke.

I told Salahuddin that I thought that Afghanistan's older generation of political leaders had failed abysmally, and that his country needed the ideas of a new generation of people who were educated and knowledgeable about the modern world but were also in touch with their own culture.

"That is what I have been thinking, too," Salahuddin said.

As he was showing me out, Salahuddin introduced me to the palace's oldest employee, a bearded man in his late sixties who wore a coat with shiny buttons and who stood at attention as we passed. He had been at the palace since the time of King Zahir Shah, Salahuddin said, although he had been dismissed by the Taliban. The Rabbanis had asked him to return. He and Salahuddin bantered about Presidential secrets, and Salahuddin described one of the important events that the old retainer had witnessed: the moment in 1959 when Queen Homaira, King Zahir Shah's wife and the leader of a movement to liberate modern Afghan women, threw off her veil. The old man nodded, confirming this, but kept silent. ♦

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THE IRAQ HAWKS

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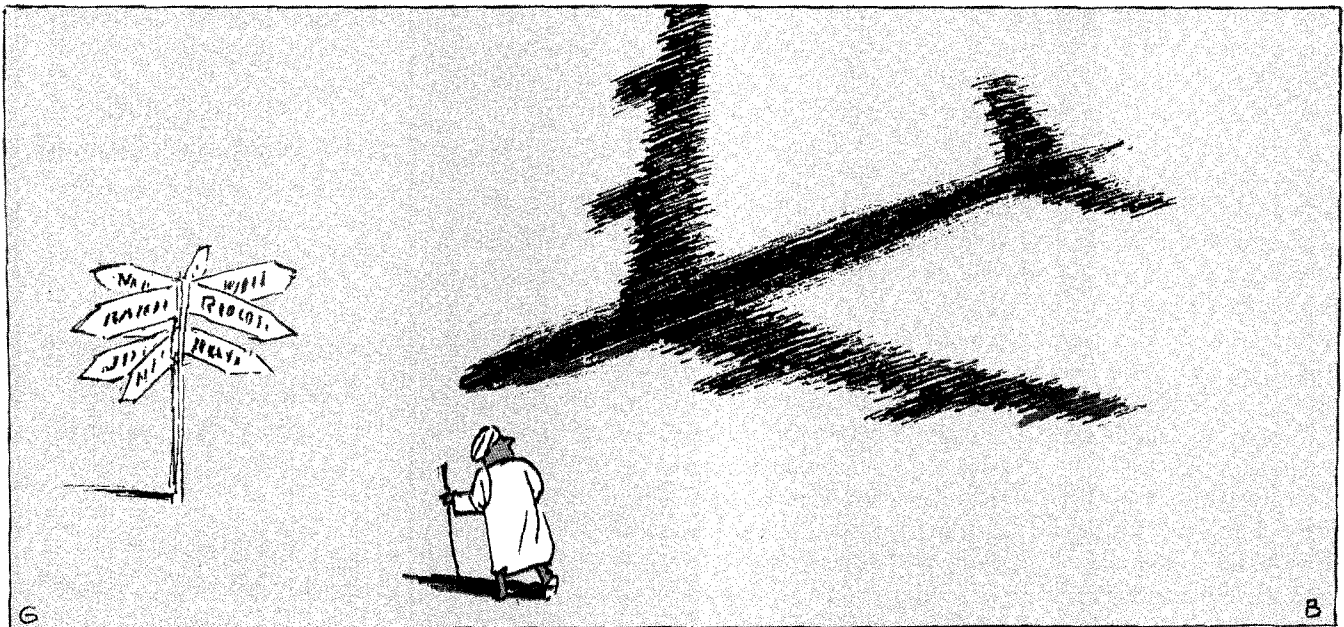
BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH

In November of 1993, Ahmad Chalabi, the leader of the Iraqi National Congress, an opposition group devoted to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, presented the Clinton Administration with a detailed, four-phase war plan entitled "The End Game," along with an urgent plea for money to finance it. "The time for the plan is now," Chalabi

simultaneous insurrections in Basra, the largest city in southern Iraq, which is dominated by disaffected Shiites (Saddam and his followers are Sunnis), and in Mosul and Kirkuk, Kurdish cities in the north. Massive Iraqi military defections would follow. "We called it Chalabi's rolling coup," Bob Baer, the C.I.A. agent in charge, recounted.

As far as recruiting agents from inside the Iraqi military, "Chalabi didn't deliver a single lieutenant, let alone a colonel or a general." Baer emphasized that he wasn't dismissive of Chalabi himself, because, as he put it, "Chalabi was trying." Even so, Baer said, "he was bluffing—he thought it was better to bluff and try to win. But he was forced to play bridge with no trump cards." Baer went on, "He always thought it was a psychological war, and that if Clinton would stand up and say, 'It's time for the guy to go,' people would do it."

Chalabi had written in his war plan that if there was "no movement" and if Saddam was permitted to export oil, "then the psychology of the people will turn. Saddam will appear to open [for]



"They believe they have found the perfect model," an analyst says. "Bombing, a modest insertion of Special Forces, plus an uprising."

wrote. "Iraq is on the verge of spontaneous combustion. It only needs a trigger to set off a chain of events that will lead to the overthrow of Saddam." It was a message that Chalabi would repeat for the next eight years.

Chalabi, who is fifty-six, was born into a wealthy Iraqi Shiite banking family and earned a doctorate in mathematics from the University of Chicago. He received money and authorization from the Clinton Administration to put his plan into effect, and by October, 1994, a small C.I.A. outpost had been set up in an area in northern Iraq controlled by the Kurds. Chalabi's headquarters were nearby. His plan called for

At the time, Baer has written in "See No Evil," a memoir to be published next month, "the C.I.A. didn't have a single source in Iraq. . . . Not only were there no human sources in country, the C.I.A. didn't have any in the neighboring countries—Iran, Jordan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia—who reported on Iraq. Like the rest of the U.S. government, its intelligence-gathering apparatus was blind when it came to Iraq."

In March, 1995, Chalabi's insurrection was launched, and failed dramatically. "There was nothing there," Baer told me. "No one moved except one Kurdish leader acting on his own—three days too late. Nothing happened."

them hope for the future. At that point he will have escaped." A month after the failed insurrection, the United Nations Security Council allowed Iraq to resume oil sales under its Oil for Food program, insuring a flow of money to the regime.

By late 1996, the Iraqi Army had all but driven Chalabi's operation out of northern Iraq. A hundred and thirty Iraqi National Congress members were executed. Chalabi managed to maintain his hold on the I.N.C., despite repeated charges from the coalition's members of mismanagement, corruption, and self-aggrandizement, and he moved

GUY BILLOUT

his anti-Saddam base to London. His plans were largely written off by the State Department and the C.I.A. America's goal would be to pursue Saddam's removal by military or political coup, and not by open rebellion. "I don't see an opposition group that has the viability to overthrow Saddam," Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni, the commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), who is now serving as the U.S. special envoy to the Middle East, later told a Senate committee. "Even if we had Saddam gone, we could end up with fifteen, twenty, or ninety groups competing for power."

Chalabi bore his fall from official favor gracefully. Disdainful of the Clinton Administration, which he felt had abandoned him in northern Iraq, he took his campaign to the press and to Congress, and the I.N.C. soon emerged as a rallying point for political conservatives and for many of the former senior officials who had run the Gulf War for the first President Bush.

In February of 1998, forty prominent Americans—including Caspar Weinberger, Frank Carlucci, and Donald Rumsfeld, all former Secretaries of Defense—signed an open letter to President Clinton warning that Saddam Hussein still posed an immediate threat, because of his stockpile of biological and chemical weapons. They urged that the government once again consider fostering a popular uprising against the Iraqi government. Echoing Chalabi's 1993 war plan, the letter writers argued that Saddam's weakness was his lack of popular support: "He rules by terror. The same brutality which makes it unlikely that any coups or conspiracies can succeed makes him hated by his own people. . . . Iraq today is ripe for a broad-based insurrection." Their first two recommendations were that the I.N.C. be recognized as the provisional government of Iraq and be reinstalled in northern Iraq. Another recommendation urged the Clinton Administration to release Iraqi assets frozen at the time of the Gulf War, which total more than \$1.5 billion, to help fund the provisional government.

The letter, like similar pleas from congressional Republicans, failed to bring about a change in policy, although eight months later President Clinton

signed the Iraq Liberation Act, which allocated ninety-seven million dollars for training and military equipment for the Iraqi opposition. Because of continued skepticism within the government, the I.N.C. has received less than a million dollars of that money, but the State Department has provided the group with roughly ten million dollars in routine operating funds.

During the Presidential campaign last year, George W. Bush and Al Gore both promised support for the opposition to Saddam—Bush said he would "take him out"—if he continued to develop weapons of mass destruction. Most arms-control experts believe that Iraq has in fact continued to develop such weapons, but after the election Condoleezza Rice, the national-security adviser, made it clear, according to a former government official, that the new Administration would not make Iraq a priority. "Her feeling was that Saddam was a small problem—chump change—that we needed to wall him into a corner so we could get on with the big issues: Russia, China, NATO expansion, a new relationship with India and, down the road, with Africa," the former official said.

Before September 11th, according to one of Chalabi's advisers, the I.N.C.'s war plan revolved around training, encouraging defectors, and American enforcement of the no-fly zone in southern Iraq. The idea was to recruit two hundred instructors and put them to work training a force of five thousand or more dissident Iraqis, reinforced by soldiers of fortune, some of whom, inevitably, would be retired Americans who had served in Special Forces units. The United States would also be asked to institute a no-drive zone, backed up by air strikes, to protect the insurgents from attack by Iraqi tanks.

A Chalabi adviser explained, "You insert this force into southern Iraq"—the site of most of Iraq's oil fields—"perhaps at an abandoned airbase west of Basra, and you sit there and let Saddam come to you. And if he doesn't come you go home and say we failed. This is not the Bay of Pigs." On the other hand, the adviser said, "if the insurgent force took Basra—that's the end. You don't have to go to Baghdad.



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You tie up his oil and he'll collapse."

Then came September 11th, and the quick victories in Afghanistan, where the combination of internal rebellion, intense bombing, and Special Forces deployment turned the Taliban out of power within weeks. Ahmad Chalabi has now given the Bush Administration an updated war plan, which calls not only for bombing but for the deployment of thousands of American Special Forces troops.

There is a second significant addition to the plan: the participation of Iran, which fought a protracted war with Iraq during the nineteen-eighties. The government of President Mohammad Khatami, America's newfound partner in the war against the Taliban, has agreed to permit I.N.C. forces and their military equipment to cross the Iranian border into southern Iraq. An I.N.C. official told me that the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control gave the organization special approval to open a liaison office in Tehran. (American companies are forbidden under federal sanctions law to do business with Iran.) The office opened in April. "We did it with U.S. government money, and that's what convinced them in Tehran," the I.N.C. official said. "They took it as a sign from the United States of a common interest—getting rid of Saddam. The way to get to him is through Iran."

Once inside Iraq, according to Chalabi's scenario, the I.N.C. would establish a firebase and announce the creation of a provisional Iraqi government, which the Bush Administration would quickly recognize. Nearly two-thirds of the Iraqi population are Shiites, and they are seen as potential allies in a political uprising. The United States would then begin an intense bombing campaign, as it did in Afghanistan, and airlift thousands of Special Forces troops into southern Iraq. At the same time, I.N.C. supporters in the north, in the areas under Kurdish control, would begin signalling that they were about to attack. If all went as planned, dissent would quickly break out inside the Iraqi military, and Saddam Hussein would be confronted with a dilemma: whether to send his elite forces south to engage the Americans or, for his own protection, keep all his forces nearby to guard against an invasion from the north.

ON LOVE

I go back to the room and the room is the same.
Terrified light bulbs burn through the day.
The blood caught in your outspread arm
hangs like frozen blooms, a dipped love bough.

On the roof above: heat and seed pool
in the dark upholstery and flowers burn up in their beds.
There were times I woke up laughing from my sleep.
The thick white clethra makes me think of this.

You want your body back and so come thudding
into mine—gorge the veins
and pull the blood down to my gut—
toll the base of my neck—beat my cussed heart.

I am at the office! so please, no more coming
on to me. Sex makes me seasick—
the cold chopped sea and nauseous hungriness—
the axe in ice, the shaft that opened when you died.

—Dana Goodyear

Chalabi's new plan also calls for the United States to provide funding for an I.N.C. mobile assault force of six battalions of armed Toyota four-by-fours, equipped with machine guns, recoilless cannons, and antitank missiles. "If you did that, there would be massive defections," the I.N.C. official told me. The six battalions, he said, could stop an Iraqi counterattack by two armored divisions. Two preliminary target areas have been isolated, both near airbases that, once secured, could be used to fly in American Special Forces troops. The attack plan was worked out with the help of a retired four-star Army general, Wayne Downing, and a former C.I.A. officer, Duane (Dewey) Claridge, who have served as unpaid consultants to the I.N.C. (Downing was appointed by President Bush in October to be the deputy national-security adviser for combatting terrorism.)

Downing, who ran a Special Forces command during the Gulf War, was convinced that the I.N.C., with airpower and a small contingent of well-trained Special Forces, could do the job inside Iraq. He was privy to one of the most astonishing engagements of the Gulf War: In mid-February of 1991, a Delta Force troop of sixteen men on

night patrol south of Al-Qaim, near the Syrian border in western Iraq, was overrun by a large enemy force, and the Iraqis wounded two Americans. The Delta troops, operating from heavily armed vehicles, counterattacked with grenade launchers and machine guns (a maneuver known as Final Protective Fire) and killed or wounded an estimated hundred and eighty Iraqis, with no further injury to themselves. One American veteran of the Gulf War told me, "In the west"—where Delta operated—"there was little opposition, and we had freedom of movement"; that is, the troops were operating on their own. "Downing loved it."

America's success in routing the Taliban has improved Chalabi's standing with some elements of Washington's defense community. "They believe they have found the perfect model, and it works," a defense analyst said of the updated war plan. "The model is bombing, a modest insertion of Special Forces, plus an uprising." Similarly, Tim McCarthy, a former United Nations weapons inspector, acknowledged that "the one thing the I.N.C. has going for it is that, once someone puts their stake down, the Iraqis will have to go after them. Saddam will have to send his Hammurabi after

them”—the Iraqi Army’s elite armored-tank division. Once Saddam made his move, McCarthy said, his forces would be exposed to American air strikes, “and then they are toast.”

Many of the people who signed the 1998 open letter to Clinton urging American support for Iraqi insurgents are now in positions of authority in the Bush Administration, including Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld; his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz; and Douglas Feith, an Under-Secretary of Defense. Richard Armitage, the Deputy Secretary of State, was also a signatory. One of the drafters of the letter was Richard Perle, the longtime conservative foreign-policy adviser in Washington, who has turned the obscure Defense Policy Board, which he chairs, into a powerful platform for advancing policies dear to the Republican right. In the past few weeks, Perle and another I.N.C. supporter, James Woolsey, a former director of the C.I.A., have inspired a surge of articles

and columns calling for the extension of the Afghan war into Iraq.

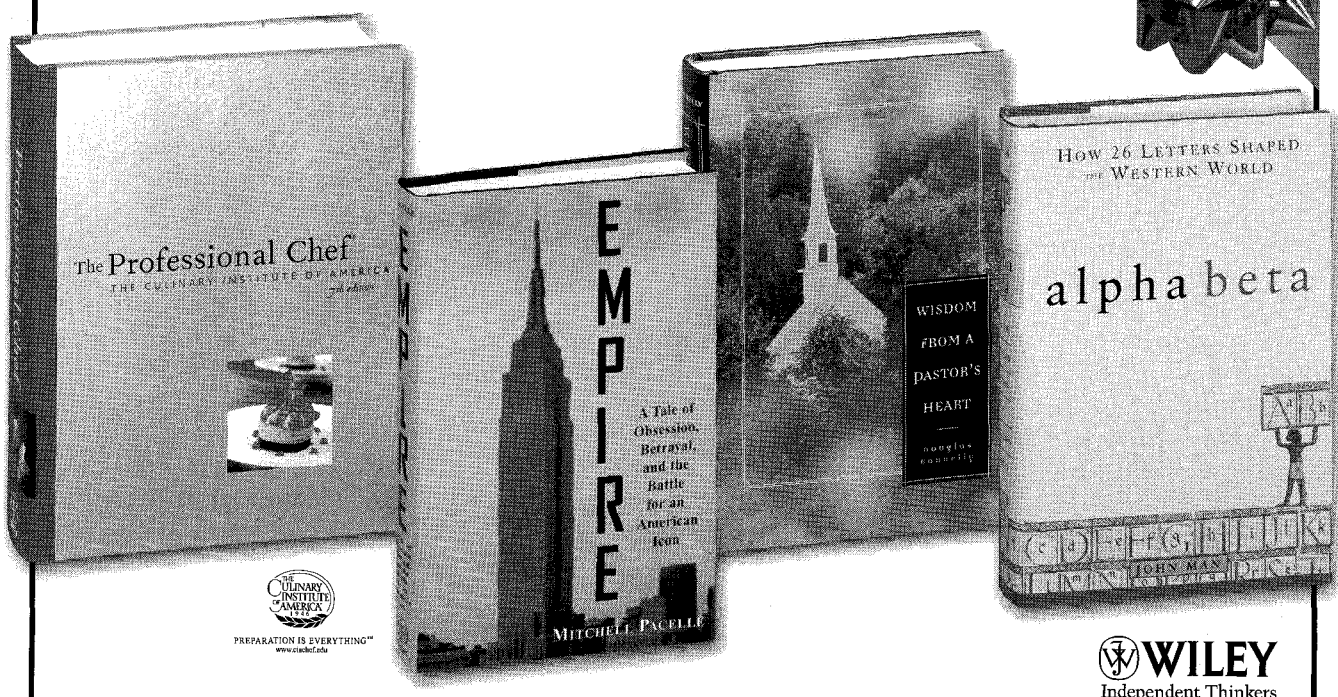
The Pentagon officials, buttressed by Perle and Woolsey, are at odds with the State Department—specifically, with their fellow letter-signer Richard Armitage, who has now become, in private, an opponent of the revised Chalabi plan. “I’ve got to believe that Wolfowitz and Feith are angry” at Armitage, one friend of all three men told me. “They feel he’s betrayed a fundamental conviction they shared.”

“September 11th changed the whole equation,” said the former New York congressman Stephen Solarz, who helped Perle draft the 1998 letter. “Before then, an argument could be made that deterrence worked.” In recent speeches and articles, Perle has dwelled on the potential threat from Iraq. Last month, at a meeting in Philadelphia of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a conservative think tank, Perle said, “The question in my mind is: Do we wait for Saddam and hope for the best? Do we wait

and hope he doesn’t do what we know he is capable of, which is distributing weapons of mass destruction to anonymous terrorists, or do we take preëemptive action? . . . What is essential here is not to look at the opposition to Saddam as it is today, without any external support, without any realistic hope of removing that awful regime, but to look at what could be created.”

One of Armitage’s supporters in the internal debate, a former high-level intelligence official, wondered scornfully if the Perle circle’s enthusiasm for Chalabi’s plan grew out of their unease about the first Bush Administration’s decision in early 1991, when they were in power, not to seek Saddam’s demise at the end of the Gulf War. “It’s the revenge of the nerds,” he said. Also, he said, “They won in Afghanistan when everybody said it wouldn’t work, and it’s got them in a euphoric mood of cockiness. They went against the established experts on the Middle East who said it would lead to fundamental

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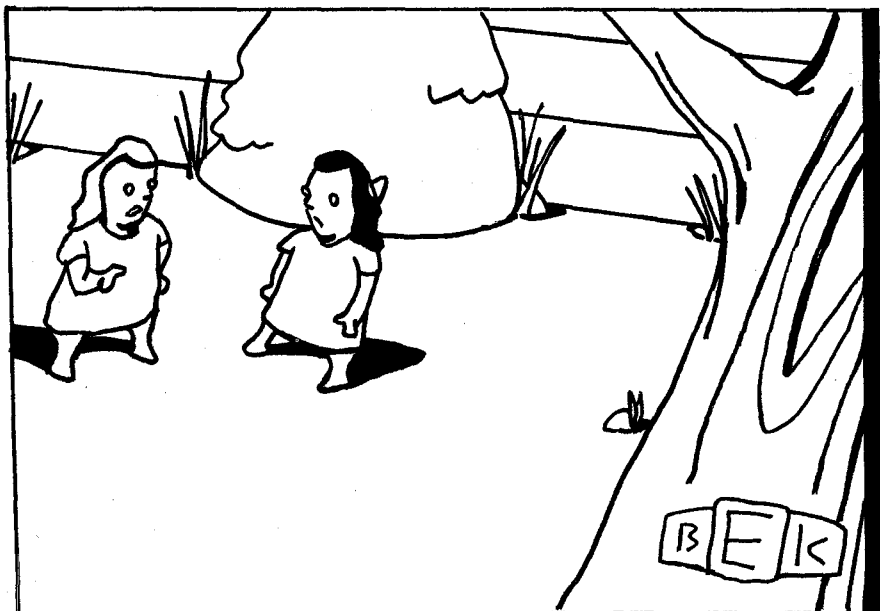
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insurrections in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. Not so, and anyone who now preaches any approach of solving problems with diplomacy is scoffed at. They're on a roll."

Armitage views the I.N.C.'s eagerness to confront Saddam, the former official told me, as ill-considered. "We have no idea what could go wrong in Iraq if the crazies took over that country," the former official said, referring to religious fundamentalists. "Better the devil we know than the one we don't." He described Armitage as confident that he could block the plan, and frustrated by the amount of time he has been forced to spend on the issue. "Dick says no way. He's going to win it." Otherwise, he added, "he knows it's going to be a political disaster."

A senior Administration official depicted Chalabi as "totally charming," but said that the Administration had no intention of allowing "a bunch of half-assed people to send foreigners into combat." Of Chalabi and his supporters in and out of government, the senior official said, "Who among them has ever smelled cordite? These are pissants who can't get the President's ear and have to blame someone else. We're not going to let them lead others down the garden path." The I.N.C., he added, is not the only Iraqi opposition group being

funded by the Bush Administration, and not the only group capable of "working through Iran."

Secretary of State Colin Powell, known to be skeptical of the I.N.C., has "backed away from the infighting," a senior general explained, and left it to Armitage, his trusted colleague, "to stall them off four or five months. There's a lot of ways to squeeze Saddam without using military force." More focussed sanctions would be one logical step, but the Bush Administration last month agreed to delay for six months its insistence on "dual use" goods, which could be employed for military or civilian purposes, while allowing medicine, food, and other essentials to flow. The Iraqi regime now exports an estimated two million barrels of oil daily under the Oil for Food program. Major purchasers include Exxon-Mobil, Chevron, and other American companies, who routinely buy the oil through third parties. As many as eight hundred thousand barrels of that oil a day end up in the U.S. market.

In recent weeks, Chalabi's revised war plan, augmented and modified by a Pentagon planning group authorized by Paul Wolfowitz, has made its way to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for evaluation. It

has left some military men cold, and prompted a debate about the lessons learned from Afghanistan and how they can be applied to Saddam. "There's no question we can take him down," a former government official told me. "But what do you need to do it? The J.C.S. is feeling the pressure. These guys are being squeezed so hard."

Some of the concerns were articulated by Robert Pape, a University of Chicago political scientist who has written widely on airpower. "The lesson from Afghanistan is less than meets the eye," Pape told me. "Airpower is becoming more effective, but the real lesson is that you need significant ground forces to make the strategy effective. The Taliban, which controlled fifty thousand troops, were thinly dispersed and never in total control of the country. We don't have an armed opposition already in Iraq like the Northern Alliance." A former senior State Department official depicted the I.N.C. proposal as "highly risky, because two things they can't control have to happen. There's got to be an uprising against Saddam, and our allies have to join us in country." A senior intelligence official similarly debunked the notion that what worked in Afghanistan would necessarily work in Iraq as equivalent to "taking the show from upstate New York to Broadway."

The military's response has been cautious and bureaucratic. A former official told me that the Joint Chiefs ordered their staff to "come up with a counterproposal," which is now in the planning stages. An Air Force consultant said that the I.N.C. is not included in the Pentagon's planning, adding, "Everything is going to happen inside Iraq, and Chalabi is going to be on the outside." According to a senior Bush Administration official, two senior American diplomats were recently sent to northern Iraq to talk to Kurdish opposition leaders and "check out who's got go and who's got no go."

Generals and admirals have been among the most outspoken critics of Chalabi's proposals. In his years of planning at CENTCOM, General Zinni concluded, according to a Clinton Administration official, that a prudent and successful invasion of Iraq would involve the commitment of two corps—at least six combat divisions, or approximately a hundred and fifty thousand soldiers—as

well as the ability to fly bombing missions from nearby airfields. In an essay published last year in the *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, Zinni, who was on the eve of retirement, wrote about what it would take to "drive a stake" through the heart of someone like Saddam:

You must have the political will—and that means the will of the administration, the Congress, and the American people. All must be united in a desire for action. Instead, however, we try to get results on the cheap. There are congressmen today who want to fund the Iraqi Liberation Act, and let some silk-suited, Rolex-wearing guys in London gin up an expedition. We'll equip a thousand fighters and arm them with ninety-seven million dollars' worth of AK-47s and insert them into Iraq. And what will we have? A Bay of Goats, most likely.

One of the officials currently involved in the Pentagon's planning said that he, too, had doubts about the efficacy of an I.N.C. armed insurrection, even one backed up by American warplanes and Special Forces. "If you go to war and don't address the root political problem, why bother?" he asked. "All we're going to get is another tyrant in five years. If this is the war to end all jihads, it's got to have a broad-based political agenda behind it."

One of Zinni's close aides told me, "Our question was 'What about the day after?' How do you deal with the long-term security aspects of Iraq? For example, do you take the Republican Guard—the military unit most loyal to Saddam—and disarm it? Or is it preferable to turn it from having a capability to protect Saddam to a capability to protect Iraq? You've got Kurds in the north, Arab Shia in the south, and the Baath Party in the middle, with great internal tribal divisions. There's potential for civil war. Layer on external opposition and you've got a potential for great instability. I'm a military planner and plan for the worst case. As bad as this guy is, a stable Iraq is better than instability."

When I asked James Woolsey, the former C.I.A. director, about these concerns, he said, "Iraq has its tribal factions and regional loyalties, but it also has a very sophisticated and intellectual infrastructure of highly educated people. There's no reason they couldn't establish a federalized—or loosely federalized—democracy."

"The issue is not how nice it would be to get rid of Saddam," a former senior Defense Department official told me. "Everybody in the Middle East would be delighted to see him go. The problem is feasibility. We looked at all these plans and always came to the conclusion that the external opposition did not have the armed ability to deal with Saddam's police state."

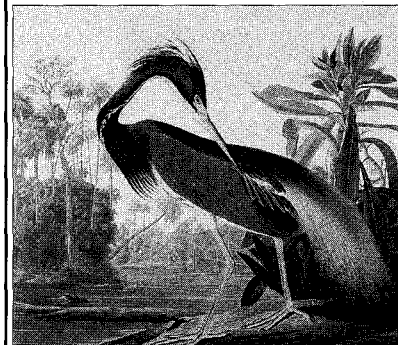
President Bush has not yet decided what to do about Iraq, according to the senior Administration official. Until he has, he said, the State Department will continue to give financial support to opposition groups, including the I.N.C. In a *Washington Post* interview earlier this fall, Condoleezza Rice used a football metaphor to indicate that all options remain open. "We will be calling audibles every time we come to the line," she told the columnist Jim Hoagland.

There is evidence that Saddam Hussein is rattled by the war talk in Washington. "The Iraqis are scared to death," one intelligence source said. The intelligence community, according to a former official, has also received hints—however hard to credit—that the Iraqis might be willing to join in the hunt for Osama bin Laden. Conciliatory messages were relayed through diplomatic channels in Canada, and eventually reached the White House.

Inside the Administration, there is a general consensus on one issue, officials told me: there will be no further effort to revive the U.N. inspection regime in Iraq. The inspectors were withdrawn in late 1998, after seven years of contentious and sometimes very successful inspections, and Iraq has refused since then to accept a new wave of inspectors. "I've been told that senior U.S. officials have little faith in the viability of the new inspection regime," one disarmament expert told me.

There is every indication that the next few months, as the President struggles to reach a decision, will produce more, perhaps much more, of the same: continued American patrolling of the no-fly zones in the south and north of Iraq and occasional bombing of military targets. A retired flag officer described the approach as deterrence: "We have to make sure that Saddam knows that if he sticks his head up he'll get whacked." ♦

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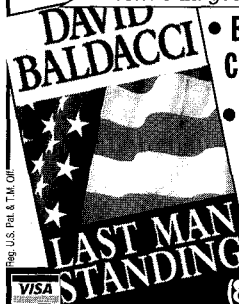
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PERSONAL HISTORY

DRESSING FOR DINNER

And other things my mother knew.

BY VALERIE STEIKER

I come from a long line of small, elegant, dark-haired women who are somewhat excitable and look good in red. In my memory, I see my mother in a bright-red coat, a ring of fur at the neck and hem, a shiny black belt around her waist. Her poise, her presence, her easy glamour—these are all things she inherited from her own mother. My grandmother, of ivory skin, dark hair and eyes, apple cheeks, was a coquette.

It was from my grandmother that my mother got her sense of vogue, so that during my childhood, in New York in the seventies, my mother would look back to her childhood, in Belgium in the thirties and forties, to the memory of her mother in fox stoles, clip earrings, crocodile handbags, a jewelled pin ever present on her lapel. Whereas my mother would be overgenerous with my sister and me, lavishing us with affection, with loving words, with presents, my mother and her mother were rivals. When my mother, age eighteen, in Antwerp, came home one day and told her mother about a beautiful coat she had seen in a boutique—Will you go look at it for me? she asked. To see if you like it?—my grandmother returned the next day with the coat in a shopping bag, having bought it for herself. It's too old for you, she said as she hung it up in her closet. My mother reacted to this minor cruelty by going too far in the other direction. She always offered us the first cut of an apple—the best piece, with its sweet flesh preserved under a shiny red back.

Two, three afternoons a week, I find my mother at the beauty parlor. She uses it like an office, talking on the telephone while her hair is being combed out, her nails painted. She doesn't call it a hairdresser's or a beauty salon, like American mothers. With throaty "R"s, she says "beauty parlor,"

the words repeated together so often in our household that they almost become one word. My mother, speaker of nine languages, has her own way of saying things, which I unconsciously adopt. Later, my sister and I will cherish these linguistic oddities, the way we always get an adage slightly wrong—"Will wonders never seize!" my mother writes to me during my sophomore year in college. But, for now, friends tease me because I say "valise" instead of "suitcase," or they try to imitate her French accent when she calls me or my sister from the other end of the apartment, "Valérie! Stéphanie!"

My mother can't do her own hair. Before her hairdresser can get to work, he turns her head into a mass of ringlets. Then, depending on my mother's mood, either her hair goes up, teased into a seductive pile of curls, or down, a more "natural" style, with spray-stiffened waves softly reaching to her shoulders. Whichever one she picks, when she gets home and looks in the mirror, she likes it better than the way she had it before. Why were we trying to keep her away from her true look? she asks. I prefer it up. After the first night of her sleeping on it, the upsweep becomes a little lopsided, my mother adding combs and bobby pins haphazardly to keep it upright. By the third morning, the curls are quite matted down, my mother vainly pulling at them to make them come back to life. This is why she loves hats. With a hat she is ready—for lunch, for walking up Madison Avenue, for her next appointment at the beauty parlor.

At home, she has baths, not showers, careful not to get her hair wet. She puts oil in the water, and we visit her, washing her back with a soapy wet cloth, dragging it pleasurably over the right angles of her shoulders, the jutting knobs of her spine. Her skin is lustrous, warm to the touch. The water as she

I love this picture -



The author's mother, Gisèle, on the boardwalk in Knokke Le Zoute, Belgium, in 1952.

leans forward beads off her skin quickly and obediently. Her back is wide and even, browned from years of sun. She is a real woman, full of curves, with floating breasts, sunken hips, a tiny waist. We have a game. When I rest my hand on her arm, she tenses it quickly, her secret way of saying I love you, which I understand as clearly as if she had breathed the words directly in my ear. In her bathrobe, she hugs us, her face slick with moisturizer. This is her private side. Hair in disarray, pins protruding, she organizes our lives, scheduling doc-

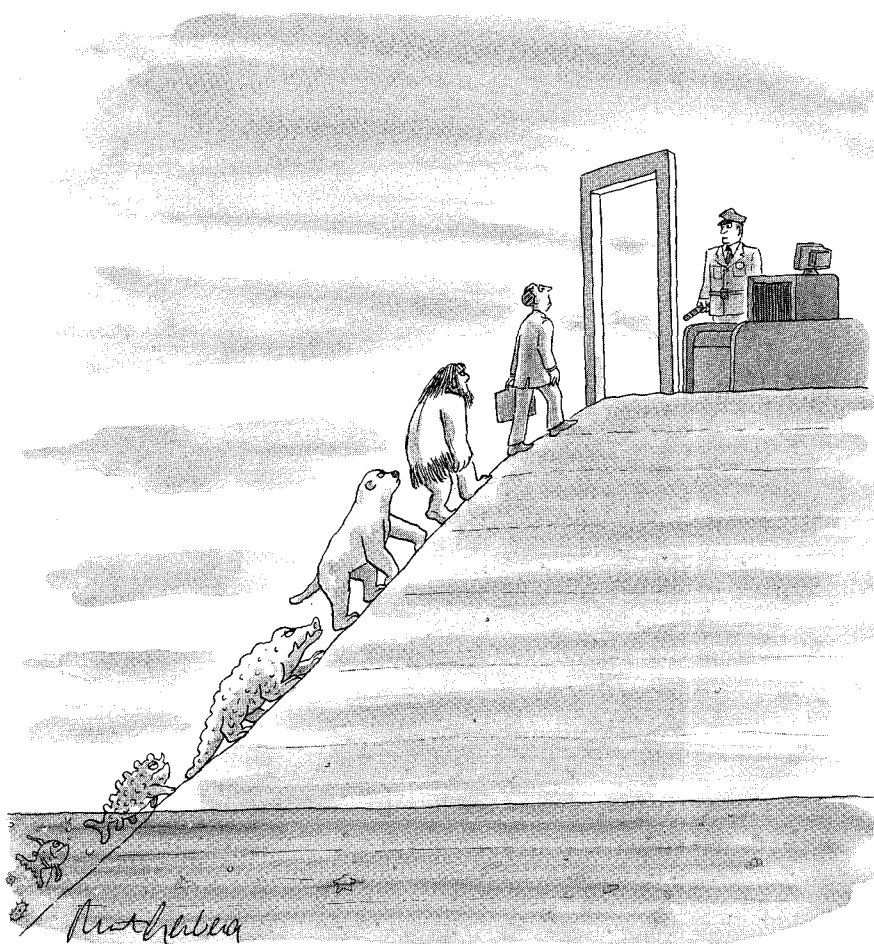
tors' appointments, planning trips, keeping up with her family in Belgium. No one else sees her this way.

After her bath, she sits on her bed, pulling on her stockings, demanding her silver-tipped shoes, her beaded handbag, a glass of club soda from the kitchen. She is quick-tempered. My sister and I scurry about, trying to keep up. We are allowed to vote on what she's wearing, putting in a plea for a certain bracelet, shoes whose shape or color we feel will work better than the ones she has chosen. We learn how an outfit is con-

structed, the disparate pieces fitting together just so. We watch in the bathroom as she blackens her lashes, applies different lipsticks, one on top of the next, until she hits on her own inimitable shade of red. My father has safely removed himself to the library, where we hear him fooling around on the piano. He plays one of several standards, ranging from his and my mother's song, "All of Me," to his own anthem, "The Sunny Side of the Street." The minute my mother is ready, she stands in the library door. "What are you doing, Jerry?" she asks. "We have to leave, we're late."

At the age of nineteen, my mother, Gisèle Neiman, left Belgium to start a new life, much as her mother had left Hungary. Born in 1908, my grandmother, Blanca Gancz, was the oldest of nine children, raised in the town of Sighet—a hub of Jewish life since the seventeenth century—in a remote province of northern Transylvania that went back and forth between Hungary and Romania over the years. Blanca went to Belgium in 1928, because one of her younger sisters was already there, having married and moved to Antwerp a year or so earlier. Two years later, Blanca met my grandfather, Avram Neiman, through a local matchmaker. Avram was a good-looking young man from Romania, passing through the Belgian port on his way to Australia to make his fortune. He took one look at Blanca and his dreams of Australia (or America, depending on who's telling the story) evaporated.

In October of 1932, my mother was born. Within a couple of years, Avram had entered the diamond trade, beginning as a polisher in the Bourse, Antwerp's diamond exchange, and slowly working his way up, eventually becoming a dealer in his own right. In one of the only photographs we have of him, he stands, under a small-brimmed hat, with his wife and daughter (my mother, age six, wears a large white flower tucked behind her ear), leaning toward them slightly in a gesture of protection and proprietorship. He used to bring my mother sweets—oranges and chocolate, mostly—and when I envisage him I see him as sepia-toned, standing in that same gentle pose, the only spot of



color a bright, round orange he holds firmly in one hand.

Blanca had furs, jewels, the latest dresses. She developed a liking for tchotchkes, collecting animal figurines and other small objects that she displayed in glass-fronted cabinets. In 1938, Blanca returned to Sighet. She arrived in a fox stole, with her six-year-old daughter, wanting to show her mother how well she had done in life. It was the last time she saw her parents and most of her siblings. Soon after this trip, right before the outbreak of war, Blanca gave birth to a son, my uncle David.

Despite the growing rumors of how Jews were suffering at the hands of German occupiers, my grandfather didn't want to leave Belgium. At one point, he got papers to go to Cuba, but he gave them away. He was a Romanian citizen, after all, and the King of Romania famously had a Jewish mistress. How my grandfather thought this would protect him in Antwerp is unclear, but, in an in-

creasingly senseless world, people seem to have clung to whatever logic they could.

I've been told that Avram escaped from the Germans seven or eight times. Each time, the Germans announced that Jewish families would be spared if the head of the household turned himself in. Each time, my grandfather escaped from custody. Responding to an order of requisition for Jewish workers in November, 1942, he once again turned himself in. This time, he was deported to Auschwitz.

My grandmother immediately changed her identity, becoming Victorine Van Belle, a Belgian *célibataire*. As she and Avram had decided beforehand, she put their money and diamonds and a few personal effects in safekeeping with trusted Gentile friends; she sent David to stay with a childless Christian couple who had a farm in the countryside between Knokke and Ghent; and she took my mother and went into hiding. Over the next two

years, my mother and grandmother stayed in seventeen places. They kept moving, never knowing how long a situation would stay safe, always having to plan the next escape.

When I think of my grandmother's actions during the war, I picture a woman of impressive resourcefulness. But my mother saw a more melancholy side. At night, Blanca would fold my mother in her arms, and they would cry together. My mother, relying on half-remembered school lessons, tried to distract her by teaching her to read and write in Flemish. Other times, she watched as her *maman* played long games of solitaire, softly crooning Yiddish folk songs under her breath. As a child, I occasionally caught my mother playing solitaire in her room, and I liked to sit beside her and watch the silent permutations of the cards.

When my mother was ten, she embroidered a sampler at school, the letters "A," "B," "C" stitched in multicolored threads. In our apartment it hung, framed in black, with these words written on the matted border: "1942. When my world fell apart. My mother, brother, and I went into hiding and my father died in Auschwitz. To my children and all children to come. May they never live through this experience."

My mother was a collector. In silver bowls and Lucite boxes, she kept every key that ever passed through her hands. She held on to all the letters she received, every photograph we ever took. In the early days of her marriage, she made albums for these stockpiles. Later, as their numbers grew unwieldy, she just crammed them into boxes and drawers.

My father, sister, and I took my mother's caches for granted. She was teaching us that it gave life meaning to have a record of it. She had boxes filled with notebooks, short stories, and essays. It was clear to us that at some point she would sit down and produce something truly spectacular. In the meantime, she gathered the accoutrements of a writer's trade—tapering silver letter openers, graceful Japanese scissors, marble-papered journals. She had a set of Victorian lap desks, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and filled with all kinds of compartments, that she said

gave her a "great elegant feeling" when she used one of them to write in bed.

My mother collected friends, too, women who were strong and funny, as she was, as well as those who were not so fortunate, either because they were divorced, married to the wrong man, or just couldn't seem to find happiness temperamentally. My mother filled my head with women's hidden secrets, their touching vanities, their sorry and glorious stories of love and loss. She was a good storyteller, with a passionate sense of right and wrong, but her morality was supple, interwoven with sympathetic strands, and it cloaked whomever she was talking about in a forgiving sheen. I was nine, ten, eleven, twelve, but having these conversations with my mother made me feel as though I were a part of the world at large. She would stop midsentence if my father came into the room. He didn't think I needed to know yet about divorce and sadness and human folly.

Within months of my grandmother's somewhat precipitous second marriage—after she and my mother and my uncle had come out of hiding—it became clear that her new husband was a mean-spirited man. He took pleasure in thwarting my mother and her brother. He ordered them to do the dishes after dinner, but if he sensed they were having too much fun while doing so he would make them stop. If he noticed they were enjoying a song on the radio, he changed the station.

The day my mother got her first period, she told her mother in the morning. Her mother and stepfather were having a dinner party that evening, and as the guests settled in the living room her stepfather called for her to come in, then announced to all the adults what had happened that day, embarrassing her in front of everyone under the guise of celebrating the fact. She stood there, shamed, not wanting to believe it was happening, hoping that she could crawl back into bed and that this news, this horrible man, would go away.

Unhappy with her stepfather, frustrated with her mother, my mother felt that life in Antwerp was becoming unbearable. The initial euphoria of the war's ending had worn off. Soon she was expected to marry. Boy after boy

was presented in Antwerp. Deals were struck, then broken, since my mother exhibited no interest in anyone. She begged my grandmother to be allowed to leave, always using the same argument. "If you loved me, you'd let me go," she'd say, day in, day out, until finally my grandmother had no choice. My mother told me that as soon as she was on the boat, about to sail for America, she started crying. "She doesn't love me, she's letting me go!"

I have a set of black-and-white photographs of my mother taken at Knokke Le Zoute, on the Belgian seacoast, in the summer of 1952, right before she came to New York. Although she couldn't swim, she makes a convincing bathing beauty, with a touse of short dark hair and a smile slipping across her lips. In one, she is lying on a beach towel in a strapless cream-colored swimsuit, her body held in perfect restraint by a combination of modesty and hidden corsetry, her skin as luminous as a seashell. Underneath is a caption of sorts, in her handwriting, that says, "What was I dreaming of? Did I think about New York?" Another shows her seated, with prettily bent knees, looking off to the distance, and above and below it the words "What am I expecting? What am I looking for?"

One summer afternoon, I walked into my mother's bedroom and caught her in tears while she was watching television. A musical was on, and it was in the middle of a deliriously happy flags-flying number, with hundreds of smiling tap dancers in red-white-and-blue sequins.

"Why are you crying?" I asked.

"Because," she said, pointing to the extravaganza filling the screen, "that is why I came to this country."

My mother had three stories of love. The first was a boy named Aby. He was the golden boy of her group. They spent summers in Knokke, the girls riding around in a red convertible, waiting for the boys to notice them, all of them going out at night to a dance club called De Hoeve. Aby was loved by all the girls, and he loved many of them in return. At some point, though, he let it be known that he preferred my mother. She was not strictly beautiful. She did not have classic features, but

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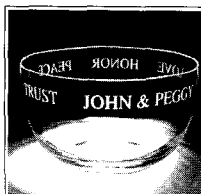
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she had something else, what her favorite aunt—rubbing her fingers together and pursing her lips—would describe as a “comme heeerrre” look. When I examine the photographs of my mother at that time, I am struck by the mindfulness she holds in her eyes. It is after the war. She has lost her father and three years of her life. She knows pain and sadness and fear, but she knows other things, too: how to get a tailor to fit a suit, what shoe will best show off her leg, even, when necessary, how to steer clear of her mother.

One night, they all went to a ball. There were many after the war. Young and old would go. Toward the end, when the band was getting ready to play its last number, my mother looked up and saw Aby walking toward her. She said to herself, “If he is not coming for me, then it’s over.” Her heart is pounding. He is walking, walking. It seems as if it will take him forever. When he gets to her, he keeps going, straight past her to his mother, who is sitting on a chair on the sidelines. My mother watches him bend down handsomely, offer his arm, and ask his mother for the last dance. My mother runs out before she has to see them dancing together. Years later, she bumps into Aby in New York, on the main floor of Bloomingdale’s, of all places. She is eager to show off her happiness,

pulling out pictures of her family—her husband, her two daughters—us. He is subdued, his hat in his hands. He has never married. It is sad, but my sister and I love this story, this ending. This is how it had to be.

My mother’s second love is more dangerous. After she has moved to America, she visits Mexico, and a short trip becomes a year-and-a-half stay. Weeks in Mexico City, weekends in Acapulco—this is when she perfects her Spanish. He is a Mexican filmmaker, full of machismo. He orders her around, decides where they’ll eat, what she should wear. A photograph shows her in a sleeveless white pants suit with tassels at the hem, a white cap slanted rakishly over her dark hair. She leans provocatively against a flower-covered stone wall, looking like a James Bond heroine. While she is in Mexico, she becomes a model and an actress. She appears on television, the beautiful girl singing and dancing and pointing in variety and game shows. For one brief week, she even dyes her hair blond.

She is in love, and only then does she learn that he is married. He lets it slip, knowing it will make no difference. They spend a night together during which he calls his wife at four o’clock in the morning to accuse her of cheating on him, while my mother listens. She can hear the woman crying and protest-

ing on the other end of the line, swearing on the Church that she has been faithful. Despite herself, my mother loves this man, his brute strength, his cruelty. She almost loses herself down there, in the Mexican sun.

By the time my mother met my father, she was tired of love. It was a hot day in July, 1966, and she was sick of everything, of living in New York, of meeting men. She couldn’t even imagine wanting to be friends with an American man, let alone falling in love with one. I know these were her exact sentiments because she was halfway through a letter describing them when she went out that night. She had the flu and wanted to stay home, but her best friend persuaded her to go to a party to meet a banker, the best friend of her boyfriend. My mother wasn’t interested. She thought he sounded dull. On his side, my father was curious but he wasn’t about to stake his night on someone he had never met, so he went to the party with a date, a blonde whom he never saw again. At the party, my father took one look at my mother and didn’t leave her side for the rest of the evening. (To this day, the family joke goes, there’s a blond woman who walks around saying, “What ever happened to Jerry Steiker?”)

The next day, my father called. I have to see you, he said. By this time, my mother felt really ill. But I don’t feel well, she answered. My father, proving himself to be more than just a banker, had a gig downtown playing the saxophone, and asked if he could meet her for a quick coffee. They went to a place near her apartment. At one point, my father reached his hand across the table and looked my mother in the eyes. How are you? he said. My mother, overwhelmed by the directness of the question, the kindness of this man she had just met, tremulous that this would become another story of failed love and she wouldn’t be able to stand it, started crying and couldn’t stop. I used to think that love meant suffering, she would later say. Until I met your father.

They were married four months afterward. My father proposed in La Grande Place, in Brussels, on his way to meet my mother’s entire family at her brother’s wedding. At the bottom of the letter she never finished and never sent,



“Don’t you have another retirement plan?”

my mother wrote, in different-colored ink, "That night I met Jerry Steiker, who became my husband."

The winter that I was nineteen, we took what would be our last family vacation together. The four of us went to Saint-Moritz, ostensibly to ski, although there was no snow that year. I had a boyfriend at college, but I was feeling bored and rebellious. On the plane ride over, I announced to my family that I wanted to have a fling. No one paid much attention.

Every night, we dressed formally for dinner. It was the eighties, so the general feeling was the more black tie the better. There was a stately Persian couple who sat across from each other night after night without uttering a word, a famous Russian ballerina with her turban, husband, and child, and a Swiss family with five boys, ranging in age from ten to twenty-five. I cast my eye in their direction, and my gaze settled on the twenty-two-year-old. He wasn't my type—he was too slender and too blond—but he was gallant, and that was enough. Seated next to me at dinner one night, he picked up one of my hands, my nails gleaming red like my mother's, and declared, in all seriousness, "They are perfect."

It was a pleasure to dress up in the evenings as our mother did. In the month before our trip, our mother had come home from department stores with shopping bags full of dresses. We had fashion shows for my father in the living room. We loved the excess, but we also felt as though it were make-believe. Life was about other things. Our mother was in remission from breast cancer. This was a sumptuous gift my parents were giving us, but we didn't confuse it with reality.

That New Year's Eve, I wore a strapless black gown. It had a gigantic black bow in the front, which cinched my waist and spread out on either side of me like wings. After dinner, my sister and I went to the local night club. Mr. Gallant was there. I felt jittery, regretting what I had started. As the clock blazed midnight, he pinned me to a wall and kissed me. Later, on the walk home through the deserted streets of the village, he stopped and said, "I guess I love you." I cringed, thinking how little he knew me. He was a fool, responding to

this show of womanliness, a wan, delicate imitation of something that was actually vivid and fierce. I avoided him the next day. By the time I reemerged, he had found another girl, and I was free. My family was amused, and I left chastened, aware that I had somehow mistaken the flares of womanhood for the real thing.

When I lost my mother, in the spring of the following year, I lost the color in my life. My father, sister, and I went away that summer, the three of us alone for the first time, and we brought only black-and-white film, as if we all intuited that it would be impossible to live in color without her.

A year later, I found myself driving through Connecticut to a friend's graduation party. My own graduation was two weeks away. I had rented a car. I was daydreaming. I didn't know where I was going to go, who I was going to be. In the left lane ahead of me was an eighteen-wheel tractor-trailer. It had been there for a while, and so I decided to pass it on the right. As I came neck and neck with the cab of the truck, I looked up and saw it moving in my direction. I honked my horn madly, but it kept coming toward me, so I swerved farther to the right to get out of the way. Within seconds, we made contact, and my car was sent spinning in front of the truck counterclockwise. I let go of the wheel, which had locked in place, and braced myself against the seat, watching the landscape speed through the front window in slow motion, a green blur. When the spinning finally stopped, the car had been flung onto the grassy embankment. A thick net of bushes had stopped it from going into the opposite lanes. I opened the door and shakily stepped out onto the grass. Still trembling, I looked down at the nose of the car, and there, stuck to the front of the grille, was the broken body of a monarch butterfly, the burnt-orange panes of its wings framed dramatically in black, like a rare fragment of stained glass. The sight of it flew straight to my heart, where I understood two things at once. Everything was different, a way of life I had known had ended, but, in this new life without my mother, all that she represented—her extraordinary spirit—would save me. ♦

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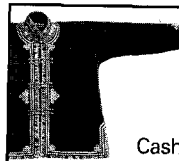
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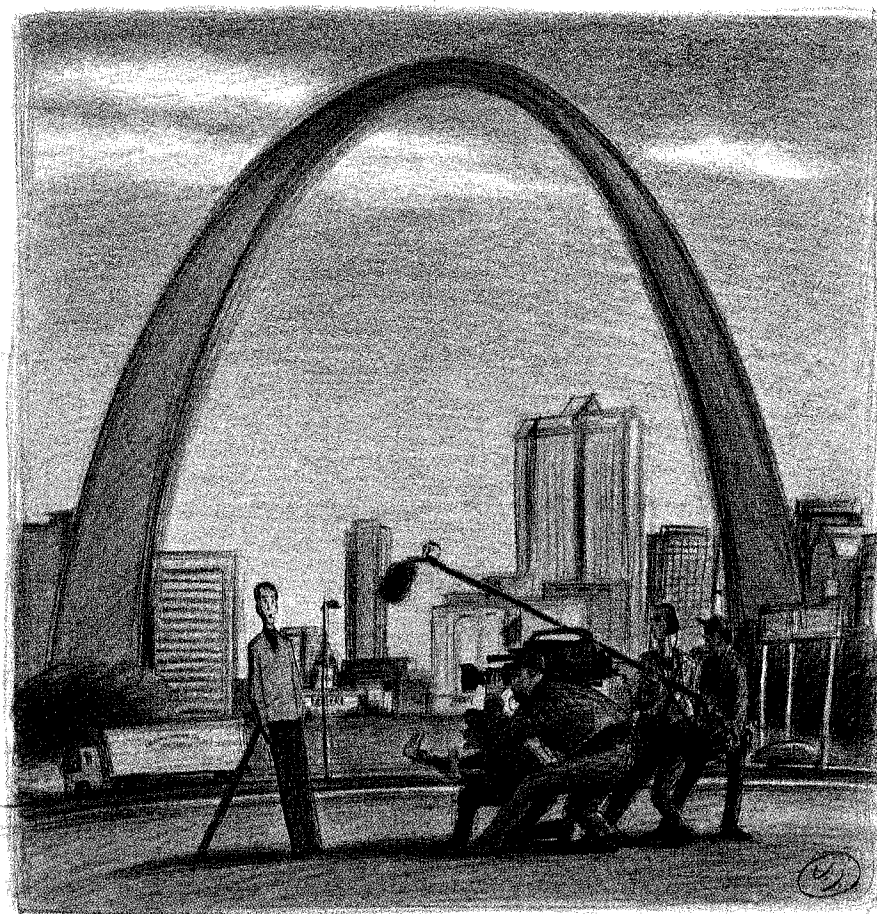
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MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS

A writer's televised homecoming.

BY JONATHAN FRANZEN

*The TV producer has a marginally coöperative actor and seven hours of daylight left.*

On a chilly morning in late September, by the side of a truck-damaged road that leads past brownfields to unwholesome-looking wholesalers, a TV producer and his cameraman are telling me how to drive across the Mississippi River toward St. Louis and what, approximately, I should be feeling as I do.

"You're coming back for a visit," they say. "You're checking out the skyline and the Arch."

The cameraman, Chris, is a barrel-chested, red-faced local with a local accent. The producer, Gregg, is a tall, good-looking cosmopolitan with fashion-model locks. Through the window of my rental car, Gregg gives me a walkie-talkie with which to communicate with him and the crew,

who will be following me in a minivan.

"You'll want to drive slow," Chris says, "in the second lane from the right."

"How slow?"

"Like thirty-five."

In the distance I can see commuter traffic, still heavy, on the elevated roadways that feed the Poplar Street Bridge. There's a hint of illegality in our plotting by the side of a road here, in East St. Louis wastelands suitable for dumping bodies, but we're doing nothing more dubious morally than making television. Any commuters we might inconvenience won't know this, of course, but I suspect that if they did know it—if they heard the word "Oprah"—most of them would mind the inconvenience less.

After I've tested the walkie-talkie, we drive back to a feeder ramp. I've spent the night in St. Louis and have come over the bridge for no other reason than to stage this shot. I'm a Midwesterner who's been living in the East for twenty-four years. I'm a grumpy Manhattanite who, with what feels like a Midwestern eagerness to coöperate, has agreed to pretend to arrive in the Midwestern city of his childhood and reexamine his roots.

The inbound traffic is heavier than the outbound was. A tailgater flashes his high beams as I brake to allow the camera van to pull even with me on the left. Its side panel door is open, and Chris is hanging out with a camera on his shoulder. In the far right lane, a semi is coming up to pass me.

"We need you to roll down your window," Gregg says on the walkie-talkie.

I roll down the window, and my hair begins to fly.

"Slow down, slow down," Chris barks across the blurred pavement.

I ease up on the gas, watching the road empty in front of me. I am slow and the world is fast. The semi has pulled up squarely to my right, obscuring the Gateway Arch and the skyline that I'm supposed to be pretending to check out.

Chris, leaning from the van with his camera, shouts angrily, or desperately, above the automotive roar: "Slow down! Slow down!"

I have a morbid aversion to obstructing traffic—inherited, perhaps, from my father, for whom an evening at the theatre was a torment if somebody short was sitting behind him—but I obey the shouted order, and the semi on my right roars on ahead of me, unblocking our view of the Arch just as we leave the bridge and sail west.

Over the walkie-talkie, as we reconnoitre for a second take, Gregg explains that Chris was shouting not at me but at his assistant, who is driving the van. Every time I slowed down, they had to slow down further. I feel sheepish about this, but I'm happy that nobody got killed.

For the second take, I stay in the far right lane and poke along at half the legal speed limit, trying to appear—what? writerly? curious? nostalgic?—while the trucker behind me looses blast after blast on his air horn.

In front of St. Louis's historic Old Courthouse, where the Dred Scott case was tried, Chris and his helper and I wait in suspense while Gregg reviews the new

VICTOR JUHASZ

footage on a handheld Sony monitor. Gregg's beautiful hair keeps falling in his face and has to be shaken back. East of the courthouse, the Arch soars above a planted grove of ash trees. I once wrote a novel that was centered on this monitory stainless icon of my childhood, I once invested the Arch and the counties that surround it with mystery and soul, but this morning I have no subjectivity. I feel nothing except a dullish anxiousness to please. I'm a dumb but necessary object, a passive supplier of image, and I get the feeling that I'm failing even at this.

My third book, "The Corrections"—a family novel about three East Coast urban sophisticates who alternately long for and reject the heartland suburbs where their aged parents live—will soon be announced as Oprah Winfrey's latest selection for her televised Book Club. A week ago, one of Winfrey's producers, a straight shooter named Alice, called me in New York to introduce me to some of the responsibilities of being an Oprah author. "This is a difficult book for us," Alice said. "I don't think we're going to know how to approach it until we start hearing from our readers." But in order to produce a short visual biography of me and an impressionistic summary of "The Corrections" the producers would need "B-roll" filler footage to intercut with "A-roll" footage of me speaking. Since my book-tour schedule showed a free day in St. Louis the following Monday (I was planning to visit some old friends of my parents), might it be possible to shoot B-roll in my former neighborhood?

"Certainly," I said. "And what about filming me here in New York?"

"We may want to do that, too," Alice said.

I volunteered that between my apartment and my studio, in Harlem, which I share with a sculptor friend of mine, there was quite a lot of visual interest in New York!

"We'll see what they want to do," Alice said. "But if you can give us a full day in St. Louis?"

"That would be fine," I said, "although St. Louis doesn't really have anything to do with my life now."

"We may want to take another day later and do some shooting in New York," Alice said, "if there's time after your tour."

One of the reasons I'm a writer is that I have uneasy relations with authority. The

only time I've ever worn a uniform was during my sophomore year in high school, when I played the baritone horn for the Marching Statesmen of Webster Groves High School. I was fifteen and growing fast; between September and November I got too big for my uniform. After the last home game of the Statesmen's football season, I walked off the field and passed through crowds of girl seniors and juniors in tight jeans and long scarves. Dying of uncoolness, I tugged down my tuxedo pants to try to cover my ridiculous spats. I undid the brass buttons of my orange-and-black tunic and let it hang open rebelliously. I looked, if anything, even less cool this way, and I was spotted almost immediately by the band director, Mr. Carson. He strode over and spun me around and shouted in my face. "Franzen, you're a Marching Statesman! Either you wear this uniform with pride or you don't wear it at all. Do you understand me?"

When I accepted Winfrey's endorsement of my book, I took to heart Mr. Carson's admonition. I understood that television is propelled by images, the simpler and more vivid the better. If the producers wanted me to be Midwestern, I would try to be Midwestern.

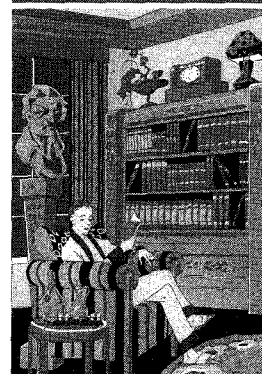
On Friday afternoon, Gregg called to ask if I knew the owners of my family's old house and whether they would let a camera crew film me inside it. I said I didn't know the owners. Gregg offered to look them up and get their permission. I said I didn't want to go inside my old house. Well, Gregg said, if I could at least walk around outside it, he would be happy to get permission from the owners. I said I wanted nothing to do with my old house. I could tell, though, that my resistance displeased him, and so I offered some alternatives that I hoped he might find tempting: he could shoot in my old church, he could shoot in the high school, he could even shoot on my old street, provided he didn't show my family's house. Gregg, with a sigh, took down the names of the church and the high school. After I hung up, I became aware that I was scratching my arms and legs and torso. I seemed, in fact, to be developing a full-blown body-wide rash.

By now, on Monday morning, as I stand in the shadow of an Arch that means nothing to me, the rash has coalesced into a flaming, shingles-like band of pain and itching around the lower

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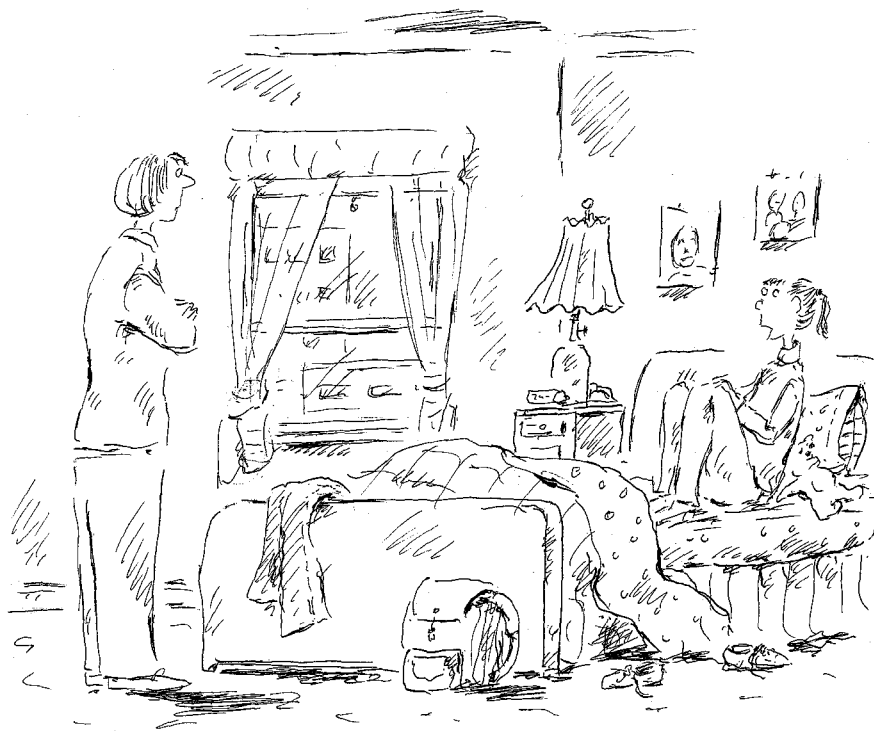
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"So I blame you for everything—whose fault is that?"

right side of my torso. This is an entirely unprecedented category of affliction for me. The itching abated during the excitement of filming on the bridge, but while we wait for Gregg to sign off on the footage I want to claw myself savagely.

Gregg at last looks up from his little monitor. Though visibly dissatisfied with the second take, he announces that a third take won't be necessary. Chris, the cameraman, grins like a hunting dog whose instincts have been vindicated. He's wearing jeans and a corduroy shirt; he looks as if he'd listened to the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd in his youth. Gregg, for his part, seems like a person to whom the Smiths and New Order were important. As he and I drive west out of the city, I wait for him to ask me questions about St. Louis or to joke with me about the tedium and artificiality of what we're doing, but he has messages to return on his cell phone. He has an expensive crew, a marginally cooperative actor, and seven hours of daylight left.

To free up Monday for shooting, I did my socializing on Sunday at the home of my parents' old next-door neighbors, Glenn and Irene Patton. The

Pattons had foreseen better than I the difficulty of visiting too many people sequentially, and they'd called me in New York to offer to host a small reception.

I pulled into my old street, Webster Woods, at three o'clock, approaching the Pattons' from the direction that didn't take me past my family's house. A light rain of no season, neither summer nor fall, was coming down; a gang of crows was cawing in some tree. Although Glenn had recently had both of his knees replaced and Irene had just recovered from a genuine case of shingles, the two Pattons looked happy and healthy when they met me at their door.

Through the windows of their kitchen, where I made ineffectual gestures of helping with refreshments, I could see the back of my old house. Irene spoke warmly of the young couple who lived in it now. She told me what she knew of their lives and of their improvements to the house in the two years since my brothers and I had sold it. Our tiny back yard was now a parking lot for a medium-sized boat and a tremendous S.U.V. The grass appeared to have been paved over, but I couldn't tell for sure, because I couldn't stand to look for more than a second.

"I told them you were coming," Irene said, "and they said you're more than welcome to come over and see the house, if you'd like."

"I don't want to see it."

"Oh, I know," Irene said. "Ellie Smith, when I called to invite her for today, said she hadn't driven down this street since you boys sold the house. She says it's just too painful for her."

The Pattons' doorbell began to ring. We'd invited four other couples who had known my parents well and whom I hadn't seen since my mother died. There was something of the miracle now in watching them arrive two by two and settle in the Pattons' carpeted living room, in seeing all of them so alive and so much themselves. They were close to my parents' age—in their seventies and eighties—and my memories of some of them were as old as my oldest memories of my parents. If you really *get* the death of a person you love, as I had finally and reluctantly *got* the death of my parents, then you know that the first and most fundamental fact of it is that you will never again see the person as a living, smiling, speaking body. This is the mysterious basic substance of the loss. To put my arms around women with whom my mother had played bridge for much of her life, to shake the large hands of men with whom my father had cleared brush or found fault with Ronald Reagan's Presidency, was to feel loss and its contrary simultaneously. Any of these couples could have been my parents, still a hundred per cent alive, still making light of their ailments, still accepting from Glenn Patton one of his famously well-poured drinks, still loading up small plates with raw vegetables and assorted dessert bars and baked Brie with a sweet tapenade. And yet they weren't my parents. There was an altered house next door to prove it. There was a boat and a bloational S.U.V. in the back yard.

By the time the party ended and I sat down to watch some Rams football in the Pattons' family room, a big autumn wind was picking up outside, drying the street and lightening the sky. I thought of the last page of "Swann's Way": The wind that "wrinkled the surface of the Grand Lac in little wavelets, like a real lake." The great oak trees that helped Marcel "to understand how paradoxical it is to seek in reality for the pictures that

are stored in one's memory, which must inevitably lose the charm that comes to them from memory itself and from their not being apprehended by the senses." And his conclusion: "The reality that I had known no longer existed."

This was a lesson I'd absorbed long before my mother died. Visiting her at home, I'd been disappointed again and again by the thinness, the unvividness, of rooms that in my memory were steeped in almost magical significance. And now, I thought, I had even less cause to go seeking the past in that house. If my mother wasn't going to come walking up the driveway in her housecoat with her hands full of the crabgrass she'd pulled or the twigs she'd picked up off the lawn, if she wasn't going to emerge from the basement with an armload of wet sheets that she'd been waiting to hang on the clothesline once the rain stopped (she'd always liked the smell of sheets that had hung outside), then the scene in the Pattons' windows didn't interest me. As I sat watching football and listened to the barren wind, I believed that the reason I couldn't stand to look at my old house was that I was done with it: that I didn't want to feel the inevitable nothing when I went inside it, I didn't want to have to blame an innocent house for still existing after its meaning had been emptied out.

But the show must go on! We shoot four takes of me making a left turn into Webster Woods, Gregg stopping us after each take so that he can examine it on his monitor. We do multiple takes of me driving very slowly toward my old house. Over the walkie-talkie, one of the men suggests that I look around curiously, as if I hadn't been here in a while. We reshoot the same scene with Chris in the passenger seat, capturing my point of view through the windshield and then wedging himself against the door to capture me looking around curiously, as if I hadn't been here in a while.

By one o'clock, we're parked at the bottom of the little hill on which my old house sits. The new owners have built a retaining wall across the incline up which I used to struggle to push a lawnmower. The wall is pink—the effect is of a Lego fortress—but maybe there's a long-term plan to let ivy grow and cover it.

After a moment, I have to look away.

The sky and the sun are brilliant, the local trees still green. Three small kids are playing outside the only new house, an ugly stuccoed box, that's been built on the street since I lived here. Gregg is asking the children's mother for permission to film them. I don't know the mother. I used to know everybody in Webster Woods, but now I know only the Pattons.

For half an hour, while the crew films generic American children romping on generic grass, I sit in the sun on a triangular traffic island across the street from the Pattons'. I try not to claw myself where I itch. Behind me is a young oak tree that my family planted after my father died. My father had left no instructions for his burial or cremation—had always refused to discuss the matter—and so we decided to plant a tree on this island where he'd cut grass and raked leaves for nearly thirty years. We scattered some of his ashes around the tree and installed a small marble marker engraved "In Memory of Earl Franzen." I have a feeling that this tree would interest Gregg, and I don't quite understand my resolve not to tell him about it. Certainly, if I'm protecting my privacy it's perverse of me to be annoyed that the crew is lavishing attention on someone else's children.

After Gregg has run to my car to get a release form for the mother to sign, I am summoned to stroll down the street while Chris, shooting, backs away from me. Gregg asks me to say a few words about the street, and I deliver a short paean to the place, my happiness in growing up here, my affection for the public schools and the Congregational church.

Gregg is frowning. "Something more specifically about this neighborhood."

"Well, obviously, it's a suburban neighborhood."

"Something about what kind of people live here."

My feeling about the people who live here is that they're not the people who

used to live here, and that I hate them for this. My feeling is that I would die of rage if I had to live on this street where I once lived so happily. My feeling is that this street, my memory of it, is mine; and yet I patently own none of it, not even the footage being shot in my name.

So I deliver, for the camera, a brief sociology lecture on how the neighborhood has changed, how the homes have been expanded, how much more money the new families have. The truth content of this lecture is probably near zero. Irene Patton has come out of her house and waves to me from her front yard. I wave back as to a stranger.

"Are you sure we can't shoot you in front of your house?" Gregg says. "Just in front of it, not inside it?"

"I'm really sorry," I say, "but I don't want to." And then, because I don't understand what it is that I'm protecting, I have a spasm of regret for being so difficult. I tell Gregg that I'll give him a picture of the house in winter with snow on it. "You can show the picture," I say.

Gregg tosses his hair back. "And you'll definitely give us that."

"Definitely."

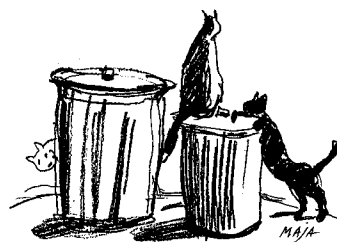
But Gregg still seems unhappy with me, and so I find myself offering him the tree. I explain to him about the tree, I tell the story, but the effect isn't what I hoped for. He seems only mildly interested as I lead the crew back to the triangle and point out the marble marker. Irene Patton is still in her yard, but I don't even look at her now.

For another half hour we shoot me and the tree from many angles and distances. I walk slowly toward the tree, I stand in front of the tree contemplatively, I pretend to contemplate the inscription at the base of the tree. The itching on my torso reminds me of the scene in "Alien" where the newly hatched alien erupts through the space traveller's chest.

Apparently, I'm failing to emote.

"You're looking up at the tree," Gregg coaches. "You're thinking about your father."

My father is dead, and I, too, am feeling dead. I remember and then make myself forget that some of my mother's ashes were scattered here as well. While Chris zooms and pans, I am mainly registering the configuration of oak twigs on my retina, trying to remember the



size of the tree when we planted it, trying to calculate its annual growth rate; but part of me is also watching me. Part of me is imagining how this will play on TV: as schmalz. Rendering emotion is what I do as a writer, and this tree is my material, and now I'm helping to ruin it. I know I'm ruining it because Gregg is frowning at me the way I might frown at a faulty ballpoint pen. That my belly and back are itching so insanely is almost a relief, because it distracts me from the shame of failing to do justice to my father and his tree. How I wish I hadn't offered Gregg this tree! But how could I not have offered *something*?

I am failing as an Oprah author, and the team and I are finishing up some final strolling footage, well into our third hour in Webster Woods, when I complete the failure. Five words come bursting from my chest like a hideous juvenile alien. I say, "This is so fundamentally bogus!"

Chris, to my surprise, raises his face from his eyepiece and laughs and nods vigorously. "You're right!" His voice is loud with merriment and something close to anger. "You're right, it is totally bogus!"

Gregg, stone-faced, merely looks at his watch. Time is short, and the author is being difficult.

From Webster Woods we drive out through the western reaches of the county to the Museum of Transportation, a glorified track siding to which rail-

roads have delivered obsolete rolling stock, perhaps taking charitable tax deductions for their trouble. I have no particular fascination with trains and I've never been to the museum, but a transportation museum makes a cameo in "The Corrections," and one of the novel's main characters is a railroad man. So my job is to stand or walk near trains and look contemplative. I do this for an hour.

When it's time for me to leave for the bookstore where I'm reading and signing tonight, I shake Gregg's hand and say I hope he got some footage he can use. In the gloom of his reply I recognize a fellow perfectionist and worrier, whose re-takes are the equivalent of my rewrites.

"I guess I'll find some way to make it work," he says.

Borders Bookstore in Brentwood is crowded when I arrive. One of my publisher's publicists, a St. Louis native named Pete Miller, has just flown in and has brought to the reading his sister, his girlfriend, and a bottle of single-malt Scotch for me to drink on my tour. Seeing him now, after a day with strangers, I feel among family again. It's not simply that I've worked with the same smallish publisher for fourteen years, or that Pete and his colleagues feel more like friends than like business associates. It's that Pete and his girlfriend have just come from New York, and New York is the city, of all the cities in the world, that feels to me like the home I grew up in. My parents

had me late in life, and my most typical experience as a child was to be left to my own devices while adults went to work and had parties. That's what my New York is.

Homesick, I nearly throw my arms around Pete. Only after I've given my reading does the full scope of my connection to this other home, this St. Louis, become apparent. In the signing line are scores of acquaintances—former classmates, parents of my friends, friends of my parents, Sunday-school teachers, fellow-actors in school plays, teachers from high school, co-workers of my father's, bridge partners of my mother's, people from church, near and distant old neighbors from Webster Woods. The new owner of my family's house, the man I've been hating all day, has driven over to greet me and to give me a relic from the house: a brass door knocker with my family's name on it. I take the knocker and shake his hand. I shake everybody's hand and drink the Scotch that Pete has poured me. I soak up the good will of people who demand nothing from me, who've simply stopped by to say hello, maybe get a book signed, for old times' sake.

From the bookstore I head straight for the airport. I'm due to take the evening's last flight to Chicago, where, in the morning, Alice and I will tape ninety minutes of interview for "Oprah." Earlier today, while I was doing my best to look contemplative for the camera, Winfrey publicly announced her selection of my book and praised it in terms that would have made me blush if I'd been lucky enough to hear them. One of my friends will report that Winfrey said the author had poured so much into the book that "he must not have a thought left in his head." This will prove to be an oddly apt description. Beginning the next night, in Chicago, I'll encounter two kinds of readers in signing lines and in interviews. One kind will say to me, essentially, "I like your book and I think it's wonderful that Oprah picked it," the other kind will say, "I like your book and I'm so sorry that Oprah picked it." And, because I'm a person who instantly acquires a Texas accent in Texas, I'll respond in kind to each kind of reader. When I talk to admirers of Winfrey, I'll experience a glow of gratitude and good will and agree that it's wonderful



"Is that your 'God Bless America' or mine?"

to see television expanding the audience for books. When I talk to detractors of Winfrey, I'll experience the bodily discomfort I felt when we were turning my father's oak tree into schmalz, and I'll complain about the Book Club logo. I'll get in trouble for this. I'll achieve unexpected sympathy for Dan Quayle when, in a moment of exhaustion in Oregon, I conflate "high modern" and "art fiction" and use the term "high art" to describe the importance of Proust and Kafka and Faulkner to my writing. I'll get in trouble for this, too. Winfrey will disinvite me from her show because I seem "conflicted." I'll be reviled from coast to coast by outraged populists. I'll be called a "motherfucker" by an anonymous source in *New York*, a "pompous prick" in *Newsweek*, an "ego-blinded snob" in the *Boston Globe*, and a "spoiled, whiny little brat" in the *Chicago Tribune*. I'll consider the possibility, and to some extent believe, that I am all of these things. I'll repent and explain and qualify, to little avail. My rash will fade as mysteriously as it blossomed; my sense of dividedness will only deepen.

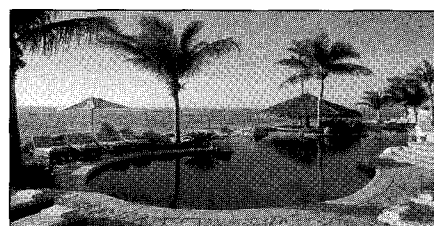
But this is all still in the future as I speed north on I-170, veering through the underlit lanes, my stomach empty, my head a little woolly with Scotch. The brass door knocker has upset me. I've left it in Pete Miller's care because I don't want to have it. (It will resurface months later in my editor's desk.) I don't want to hold the knocker, don't even want to look at it, for the same reason that I've been averting my eyes from my old house. Not because it reminds me of how empty of meaning the house is now but because the house is perhaps not so empty after all. The distant past may live only in my head, and my memories of it may merely be mocked by the sterile present, but there are much more recent and much more painful memories that I haven't touched at all: memories that I've tried to leave behind me in the house.

For example, there's the little Pyrex dish of canned peas that I found in the refrigerator the last time my mother was in the hospital. She had long ago reconciled herself to staying in the house while her children fled to the coasts. We invited her to move to one of the coasts herself, but the house was her life, it was what she still had, it was not so much the site of her loneliness as the antidote to it. But she

was often very alone there, and I was always at pains, in New York, not to remember this aloneness. Generally, I managed to forget it pretty well, but when I flew into town on the day of her last surgery I found unavoidable reminders in the house: a soiled towel soaking in a bucket in the basement, a half-finished crossword by her bed. For the week or so before she was hospitalized, my mother couldn't keep any food down, and by the time I arrived her refrigerator was empty of almost everything but ancient condiments and delicacies. On the top shelf there was just a quart of skim milk, a tiny can of green peas with a square of foil on top, and, next to this can, a dish containing a single bite of peas. I was ambushed and nearly destroyed by this dish of peas. I was forced to imagine my mother alone in the house and willing herself to eat a bite of something, anything, a bite of peas, and finding herself unable to. With her usual frugality and optimism, she'd put both the can and the dish in the refrigerator, in case her appetite returned.

The last day I was ever in the house, three months later, I worked with one of my brothers to make last-minute repairs and to box my old belongings. We'd been going at it twelve and fourteen hours a day that week, and I was packing furiously up to the moment I went to fetch a rental truck. I didn't have time to feel much of anything but the pleasure of getting the boxes labelled, the truck loaded up; and then suddenly it was time for me to leave. I went looking for my brother to say goodbye to him. I happened to pass my old bedroom, I found myself stopping in the hallway to look inside, and it occurred to me that *I would never see this room again*; a wave of grief rose up in me. I ran down the stairs, breathing heavily through my mouth, not seeing well. I clapped my arms around my brother and ran, just ran, from the house and hopped in the truck and drove too fast down the driveway, ripping a branch off a tree in my hurry to get on the road. I think I made myself be done then. I think the implicit promise I gave myself that afternoon, the promise I would have broken if I'd gone back inside the house today, was that I had left for the last time and would never have to leave again.

Promises, promises. I'm speeding toward the airport. ♦



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THE DEATH OF JACK HAMILTON

BY STEPHEN KING

Want you to get one thing straight from the start: wasn't nobody on earth didn't like my pal Johnnie Dillinger, except Melvin Purvis of the F.B.I. Purvis was J. Edgar Hoover's right-hand man, and he hated Johnnie like poison. Everyone else—well, Johnnie had a way of making folks like him, that's all. And he had a way of making people laugh. God makes it come right in the end, that's something he used to say. And how can you not like a guy with that kind of philosophy?

But people don't want to let a man like that die. You'd be surprised how many folks still say it wasn't Johnnie the Feds knocked down in Chicago beside the Biograph Theatre on July 22, 1934. After all, it was Melvin Purvis who'd been in charge of hunting Johnnie down, and, besides being mean, Purvis was a goddam fool (the sort of man who'd try to piss out a window without remembering to open it first). You won't hear no better from me, either. Little fag of a dandy, how I hated him! How we all did!

We got away from Purvis and the Gees after the shootout at Little Bohemia, Wisconsin—all of us! The biggest mystery of the year was how that goddam pansy ever kept his job. Johnnie once said, "J. Edgar probably can't get that good a blow job from a dame." How we laughed! Sure, Purvis got Johnnie in the end, but only after setting an ambush outside the Biograph and shooting him in the back while he was running down an alley. He fell down in the muck and the cat shit and said, "How's this, then?" and died.

Still folks won't believe it. Johnnie was handsome, they say, looked almost like a movie star. The fella the Gees shot outside the Biograph had a fat face, all swollen up and bloated like a cooked sausage. Johnnie was barely thirty-one, they say, and the mug the cops shot that night looked forty, easy! Also (and here they drop their voices to a whisper), everyone knows John

Dillinger had a pecker the size of a Louisville Slugger. That fella Purvis ambushed outside the Biograph didn't have nothing but the standard six inches. And then there's the matter of that scar on his upper lip. You can see it clear as day in the morgue photographs (like the one where some yo-yo is holding up my old pal's head

and looking all solemn, as if to tell the world once and for all that Crime Does Not Pay). The scar cuts the side of Johnnie's mustache in two. Everyone knows John Dillinger never had a scar like that, people say; just look at any of the other pictures. God knows there's enough of them.

There's even a book that says Johnnie



John Dillinger, in 1934, at Crown Point jail in Indiana, leaning on the shoulder of the countess

didn't die—that he lived on long after the rest of his running buddies, and finished up in Mexico, living in a hacienda and pleasing any number of señoras and señoritas with his oversized tool. The book claims that my old pal died on November 20, 1963—two days before Kennedy—at the ripe old age of sixty, and it wasn't no federal bullet that took him off but a plain old heart attack, that John Dillinger died in bed.

It's a nice story, but it ain't true.

Johnnie's face looks big in those last photos because he'd really packed on the pounds. He was the type who eats when he's nervous, and after Jack Hamilton died, in Aurora, Illinois, Johnnie felt he was next. Said as much, in that

gravel pit where we took poor old Jack.

As for his tool—well, I'd known Johnnie ever since we met at Pendleton Reformatory in Indiana. I saw him dressed and undressed, and Homer Van Meter is here to tell you that he had a good one, but not an especially great one. (I'll tell you who had a great one, if you want to know: Dock Barker—the mama's boy! Ha!)

Which brings me to the scar on Johnnie's upper lip, the one you can see cutting through his mustache in those pictures where he's lying on the cooling board. The reason the scar doesn't show in any of Johnnie's other pictures is that he got it near the end. It happened in Aurora, while Jack (Red) Hamilton, our

old pal, was on his deathbed. That's what I want to tell you about: how Johnnie Dillinger got the scar on his upper lip.

Me and Johnnie and Red Hamilton got away from the Little Bohemia shootout through the kitchen windows in back, making our way down the side of the lake while Purvis and his idiots were still pouring lead into the front of the lodge. Boy, I hope the kraut who owned the place had insurance! The first car we found belonged to an elderly neighbor couple, and it wouldn't start. We had better luck with the second—a Ford coupe that belonged to a carpenter just up the road. Johnnie put him in the driver's seat, and he chauffeured us a good way back toward St. Paul. Then he was invited to step out—which he did quite willingly—and I took over.

We crossed the Mississippi about twenty miles downriver from St. Paul, and although the local cops were all on the lookout for what they called the Dillinger Gang, I think we would have been all right if Jack Hamilton hadn't lost his hat while we were making our escape. He was sweating like a pig—he always did when he was nervous—and when he found a rag on the back seat of the carpenter's car he whipped it into a kind of rope and tied it around his head, Injun style. That was what caught the eye of those cops parked on the Wisconsin side of the Spiral Bridge as we went past them, and they came after us for a closer look.

That might have been the end of us right there, but Johnnie always had the Devil's own luck—until the Biograph, anyway. He put a cattle truck right between us and them, and the cops couldn't get past.

"Step on it, Homer!" Johnnie shouts at me. He was in the back seat, and in rare good humor from the sound of him. "Make it walk!"

I did, too, and we left the cattle truck in the dust, with those cops stuck behind it. So long, Mother, I'll write when I get work. Ha!

Once it seemed we had them buried for good, Jack says, "Slow down, you damned fool—no sense getting picked up for speeding."

So I slowed down to thirty-five and for a quarter of an hour everything was fine. We were talking about Little Bohemia, and whether or not Lester (the



rosecutor. Dillinger later stole the car of the sheriff (Lillian Holley, far left) and escaped.

one they were always calling Baby Face) might have gotten away, when all at once there's the crackle of rifles and pistols, and the sound of bullets whining off the pavement. It was those hick cops from the bridge. They'd caught up, creeping easy the last ninety or a hundred yards, and were close enough now to be shooting for the tires—they probably weren't entirely sure, even then, that it was Dillinger.

They weren't in doubt for long. Johnnie broke out the back window of the Ford with the butt of his pistol and started shooting back. I mashed the gas pedal again and got that Ford all the way up to fifty, which was a tearing rush in those days. There wasn't much traffic, but what there was I passed any way I could—on the left, on the right, in the ditch. Twice I felt the driver's-side wheels go up, but we never tipped. Nothing like a Ford when it came to a getaway. Once Johnnie wrote to Henry Ford himself. "When I'm in a Ford, I can make any car take my dust," he told Mr. Ford, and we surely dusted them that day.

We paid a price, though. There were these *spink! spink! spink!* noises, and a crack ran up the windshield and a slug—I'm pretty sure it was a .45—fell dead on the dashboard. It looked like a big black elm beetle.

Jack Hamilton was in the passenger seat. He got his tommy gun off the floor and was checking the drum, ready to lean out the window, I imagine, when

there came another of those *spink!* noises. Jack says, "Oh! Bastard! I'm hit!" That bullet had to have come in the busted back window and how it missed Johnnie to hit Jack I don't know.

"Are you all right?" I shouted. I was hung over the wheel like a monkey and driving like one, too, very likely. I passed a Coulee Dairy truck on the right, honking all the time, yelling for that white-coat-farmer-son-of-a-bitch to get out of my road. "Jack, are you all right?"

"I'm O.K., I'm fine!" he says, and shoves himself and his sub gun out the window, almost to his waist. Only, at first the milk truck was in the way. I could see the driver in the mirror, gawking at us from under his little hat. And when I looked over at Jack as he leaned out I could see a hole, just as neat and round as something you'd draw with a pencil, in the middle of his overcoat. There was no blood, just that little black hole.

"Never mind Jack, just run the son of a bitch!" Johnnie shouted at me.

I ran it. We gained maybe half a mile on the milk truck, and the cops stuck behind it the whole while because there was a guardrail on one side and a line of slowpoke traffic coming the other way. We turned hard, around a sharp curve, and for a moment both the milk truck and the police car were out of sight. Suddenly, on the right, there was a gravel road all grown in with weeds.

"In there!" Jack gasps, falling back

into the passenger seat, but I was already turning in.

It was an old driveway. I drove about seventy yards, over a little rise and down the other side, ending at a farmhouse that looked long empty. I killed the engine, and we all got out and stood behind the car.

"If they come, we'll give 'em a show," Jack says. "I ain't going to no electric chair like Harry Pierpont."

But no one came, and after ten minutes or so we got back in the car and drove out to the main road, all slow and careful. And that's when I saw something I didn't like much. "Jack," I says, "you're bleeding out your mouth. Look out or it'll be on your shirt."

Jack wiped his mouth with the big finger of his right hand, looked at the blood on it, and then gave me a smile that I still see in my dreams: big and broad and scared to death. "I just bit the inside of my cheek," says he. "I'm all right."

"You sure?" Johnnie asks. "You sound kind of funny."

"I can't catch all my breath just yet," Jack says. He wiped his big finger across his mouth again and there was less blood, and that seemed to satisfy him. "Let's get the fuck out of here."

"Turn back toward the Spiral Bridge, Homer," Johnnie says, and I did like he told me. Not all the stories about Johnnie Dillinger are true, but he could always find his way home, even after he didn't have no home no more, and I always trusted him.

We were once again doing a perfectly legal parson-go-to-meeting thirty miles per, when Johnnie saw a Texaco station and told me to turn off to the right. We were soon on country gravel roads, Johnnie calling lefts and rights, even though all the roads looked the same to me: just wheel ruts running between clapped-out cornfields. The roads were muddy, and there were still scraps of snow in some of the fields. Every now and then there'd be some hick kid watching us go by. Jack was getting quieter and quieter. I asked him how he was doing and he said, "I'm all right."

"Yes, well, we ought to get you looked at when we cool off a little," Johnnie said. "And we have to get your coat mended, too. With that hole in it, it looks like somebody shot you!" He laughed, and so did I. Even Jack laughed. Johnnie could always cheer you up.



"I wrote another five hundred words. Can I have another cookie?"

"I don't think it went deep," Jack said, just as we came out on Route 43. "I'm not bleeding out of my mouth anymore—look." He turned to show Johnnie his finger, which now just had a maroon smear on it. But when he twisted back into his seat blood poured out of his mouth and nose.

"I think it went deep enough," Johnnie said. "We'll take care of you—if you can still talk, you're likely fine."

"Sure," Jack said. "I'm fine." His voice was smaller than ever.

"Fine as a fiddler's fuck," I said.

"Aw, shut up, you dummocks," he said, and we all had a laugh. They laughed at me a lot. It was all in fun.

About five minutes after we got back on the main road, Jack passed out. He slumped against the window, and a thread of blood trickled from one corner of his mouth and smeared on the glass. It reminded me of swatting a mosquito that's had its dinner—the claret everywhere. Jack still had the rag on his head, but it had gone crooked. Johnny took it off and cleaned the blood from Jack's face with it. Jack muttered and raised his hands as if to push Johnnie away, but they dropped back into his lap.

"Those cops will have radioed ahead," Johnnie says. "If we go to St. Paul, we're finished. That's what I think. How about you, Homer?"

"The same," I says. "What does that leave? Chicago?"

"Yep," he says. "Only first we have to ditch this motor. They'll have the plates by now. Even if they didn't, it's bad luck. It's a damn hoodoo."

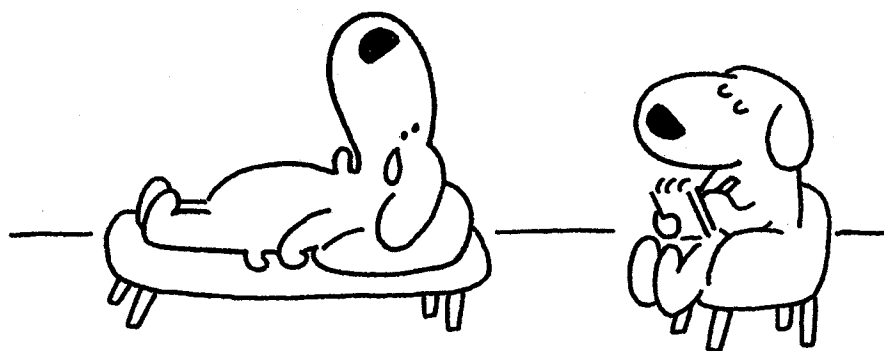
"What about Jack?" I says.

"Jack will be all right," he says, and I knew to say no more on the subject.

We stopped about a mile down the road, and Johnnie shot out the front tire of the hoodoo Ford while Jack leaned against the hood, looking pale and sick.

When we needed a car, it was always my job to flag one down. "People who wouldn't stop for any of the rest of us will stop for you," Johnnie said once. "Why is that, I wonder?"

Harry Pierpont answered him. This was back in the days when it was still the Pierpont Gang instead of the Dillinger Gang. "Because he looks like a Homer," he said. "Wasn't ever anyone looked so much like a Homer as Homer Van Meter does."



C. Burroughs

"'Bad dog, bad dog,' she said. 'We should have gotten a cat.'"

We all laughed at that, and now here I was again, and this time it was really important. You'd have to say life or death.

Three or four cars went by and I pretended to be fiddling with the tire. A farm truck was next, but it was too slow and waddy. Also, there were some fellas in the back. Driver slows down and says, "You need any help, amigo?"

"I'm fine," I says. "Workin' up a appetite for lunch. You go right on."

He gives me a laugh and on he went. The fellas in the back also waved.

Next up was another Ford, all by its lonesome. I waved my arms for them to stop, standing where they couldn't help but see that flat shoe. Also, I was giving them a grin. That big one that says I'm just a harmless Homer by the side of the road.

It worked. The Ford stopped. There was three folks inside, a man and a young woman and a fat baby. A family.

"Looks like you got a flat there, partner," the man says. He was wearing a suit and a topcoat, both clean but not what you'd call Grade A.

"Well, I don't know how bad it can be," I says, "when it's only flat on the bottom."

We was still laughing over that just like it was new when Johnnie and Jack come out of the trees with their guns drawn.

"Just hold still, sir," Jack says. "No one is going to get hurt."

The man looked at Jack, looked at Johnnie, looked at Jack again. Then his eyes went back to Johnnie and his mouth dropped open. I seen it a thousand times, but it always tickled me.

"You're Dillinger!" he gasps, and then shoots his hands up.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," Johnnie says, and grabs one of the man's hands out of the air. "Get those mitts down, would you?"

Just as he did, another two or three cars came along—country-go-to-town types, sitting up straight as sticks in their old muddy sedans. We didn't look like nothing but a bunch of folks at the side of the road getting ready for a tire-changing party.

Jack, meanwhile, went to the driver's side of the new Ford, turned off the switch, and took the keys. The sky was white that day, as if with rain or snow, but Jack's face was whiter.

"What's your name, Ma'am?" Jack asks the woman. She was wearing a long gray coat and a cute sailor's cap.

"Deelie Francis," she says. Her eyes were as big and dark as plums. "That's Roy. He's my husband. Are you going to kill us?"

Johnnie give her a stern look and says, "We are the Dillinger Gang, Mrs. Francis, and we have never killed anyone." Johnnie always made this point. Harry Pierpont used to laugh at him and ask him why he wasted his breath, but I think Johnnie was right to do that. It's one of the reasons he'll be remembered long after the straw-hat-wearing little pansy is forgot.

"That's right," Jack says. "We just rob banks, and not half as many as they say. And who is this fine little man?" He chuckled the kiddo under the chin. He was fat, all right; looked like W. C. Fields.

"That's Buster," Deelie Francis says.

"Well, he's a regular little bouncer, ain't he?" Jack smiled. There was blood on

his teeth. "How old is he? Three or so?"

"Just barely two and a half," Mrs. Francis says proudly.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, but he's big for his age. Mister, are you all right? You're awful pale. And there's blood on your—"

Johnnie speaks up then. "Jack, can you drive this one into the trees?" He pointed at the carpenter's old Ford.

"Sure," Jack says.

"Flat tire and all?"

"You just try me. It's just that . . . I'm awful thirsty. Ma'am—Missus Francis—do you have anything to drink?"

She turned around and bent over—not easy with that horse of a baby in her arms—and got a thermos from the back.

Another couple of cars went puttering by. The folks inside waved, and we waved back. I was still grinning fit to split, trying to look just as Homer as a Homer could be. I was worried about Jack and didn't know how he could stay on his feet, let alone tip up that thermos and swig what was inside. Iced tea, she told him, but he seemed not to hear. When he handed it back to her, there were tears rolling down his cheeks. He thanked her, and she asked him again if he was all right.

"I am now," Jack says. He got into the hoodoo Ford and drove it into the bushes, the car jouncing up and down on the tire Johnnie had shot out.

"Why couldn't you have shot out a back one, you goddam fool?" Jack sounded angry and out of breath. Then he wrestled the car into the trees and out of sight, and came back, walking slow and looking at his feet, like a old man on ice.

"All right," Johnnie says. He'd discovered a rabbit's foot on Mr. Francis's key ring, and was working it in a way that made me know that Mr. Francis wasn't ever going to see that Ford again. "Now, we're all friends here, and we're going to take a little ride."

Johnnie drove. Jack sat in the passenger seat. I squeezed in back with the Francis and tried to get the piglet to shoot me a grin.

"When we get to the next little town," Johnnie says to the Francis family in the back seat, "we're going to drop you off with enough for bus fare to get you where you were going. We'll take the car. We won't hurt it a bit, and if no one shoots any bullet holes in it you'll get it back good as new. One of us'll phone you where it is."

"We haven't got a phone yet," Deelie says. It was really a whine. She sounded like the kind of woman who needs a smack every second week or so to keep her tits up. "We're on the list, but those telephone people are slower than cold molasses."

"Well, then," Johnnie says, good-humored and not at all perplexed, "we'll give the cops a call, and they'll get in touch. But if you squawk, you won't ever get it back in running shape."

Mr. Francis nodded as if he believed every word. Probably he did. This was the Dillinger Gang, after all.

Johnnie pulled in at a Texaco, gasped up, and bought soda pops all around. Jack drank a bottle of grape like a man dying of thirst in the desert, but the woman wouldn't let Master Piglet have his. Not so much as a swallow. The kid was holding his hands out for it and bawling.

"He can't have pop before his lunch," she says to Johnnie, "what's wrong with you?"

Jack was leaning his head against the glass of the passenger window with his eyes shut. I thought he'd passed out again, but he says, "Shut that brat up, missus, or I will."

"I think you've forgotten whose car you're in," she says, all haughty.

"Give him his pop, you bitch," Johnnie says. He was still smiling, but now it was his other smile. She looked at him and the color in her cheeks disappeared. And that's how Master Piglet got his Nehi, lunch or no lunch. Twenty miles farther on, we dropped them off in some little town and went on our way toward Chicago.

"A man who marries a woman like that deserves all he gets," Johnnie remarked, "and he'll get plenty."

"She'll call the law," Jack says, still without opening his eyes.

"Never will," Johnnie says, as confident as ever. "Wouldn't spare the nickel." And he was right. We saw only two blue beetles before we got into Chi, both going the other way, and neither one of them so much as slowed down to look at us. It was Johnnie's luck. As for Jack, you had only to look at him to know that his supply of luck was running out fast. By the time we got to the Loop, he was delirious and talking to his mother.

"Homer!" Johnnie says, in that wide-

eyed way that always used to tickle me. Like a girl doing a flirt.

"What!" I says, giving him the glad eye right back.

"We got no place to go. This is worse than St. Paul."

"Go to Murphy's," Jack says without opening his eyes. "I want a cold beer. I'm thirsty."

"Murphy's," Johnnie says. "You know, that's not a bad idea."

Murphy's was an Irish saloon on the South Side. Sawdust, a steam table, two bartenders, three bouncers, friendly girls at the bar, and a room upstairs where you could take them. More rooms in the back, where people sometimes met, or cooled off for a day or two. We knew four places like it in St. Paul, but only a couple in Chi. I parked the Francis' Ford up in the alley. Johnnie was in the back seat with our delirious friend—we weren't yet ready to call him our dying friend—and he was holding Jack's head against the shoulder of his coat.

"Go in and get Brian Mooney off the bar," Johnnie says.

"What if he isn't there?"

"Then I don't know," Johnnie says.

"Harry!" Jack shouts, presumably calling for Harry Pierpont. "That whore you set me up with has given me the goddam clap!"

"Go on," Johnnie says to me, soothing his hand through Jack's hair just like a mother.

Well, Brian Mooney was there—Johnnie's luck again—and we got a room for the night, although it cost two hundred dollars, which was pretty dear, considering the view was an alley and the toilet was at the far end of the hall.

"You boys are hotter than hell," Brian says. "Mickey McClure would have sent you right back into the street. There's nothing in the papers and on the radio but Little Bohemia."

Jack sat down on a cot in the corner, and got himself a cigarette and a cold draft beer. The beer brought him back wonderful; he was almost himself again. "Did Lester get away?" he asked Mooney. I looked over at him when he spoke up and saw a terrible thing. When he took a drag off his Lucky and inhaled, a little puff come out of the hole in the back of his overcoat like a smoke signal.

"You mean Baby Face?" Mooney asked.

"You don't want to call him that where he can hear you," Johnnie said, grinning. He was happier now that Jack had come back around, but he hadn't seen that puff of smoke coming out of his back. I wished I hadn't, either.

"He shot a bunch of Gees and got away," Mooney said. "At least one of the Gees is dead, maybe two. Anyway, it just makes it that much worse. You can stay here tonight, but you have to be gone by tomorrow afternoon."

He went out. Johnnie waited a few seconds, then stuck his tongue out at the door like a little kid. I got laughing—Johnnie could always make me laugh. Jack tried to laugh, too, but quit. It hurt him too much.

"Time to get you out of that coat and see how bad it is, partner," Johnnie said.

It took us five minutes. By the time he was down to his undershirt, all three of us were soaked with sweat. Four or five times I had to put my hands over Jack's mouth to muffle him. I got blood all over my cuffs.

There was no more than a rose on the lining of his overcoat, but his white shirt had gone half red and his undershirt was soaked right through. Sticking up on the left side, just below his shoulder blade, was a lump with a hole in the middle of it, like a little volcano.

"No more," Jack says, crying. "Please, no more."

"That's all right," Johnnie says, running the palm of his hand through Jack's hair again. "We're all done. You can lie down now. Go to sleep. You need your rest."

"I can't," he says. "It hurts too much. Oh, God, if you only knew how it hurts! And I want another beer. I'm thirsty. Only don't put so much salt in it this time. Where's Harry, where's Charlie?"

Harry Pierpont and Charlie Makley, I guessed—Charlie was the Fagin who'd turned Harry and Jack out when they weren't no more than snotnoses.

"There he goes again," Johnnie says. "He needs a doc, Homer, and you're the boy who has to find one."

"Jesus, Johnnie, this ain't my town!"

"Doesn't matter," Johnnie says. "If I go out, you know what's going to happen. I'll write down some names and addresses."

It ended up being just one name and one address, and when I got there it was

all for nothing. The doc (a pill-roller whose mission was giving abortions and acid melts to erase fingerprints) had hopped himself to death on his own laudanum two months before.

We stayed in that cheesy room behind Murphy's for five days. Mickey McClure showed up and tried to turn us out, but Johnnie talked to him in the way that Johnnie had—when he turned on the charm, it was almost impossible to tell Johnnie no. And, besides, we paid. By the fifth night, the rent was four hundred, and we were forbidden to so much as show our faces in the tap-room for fear someone would see us. No one did, and as far as I know the cops never found out where we were during those five days in late April. I wonder how much Mickey McClure made on the deal—it was more than a grand. We pulled bank jobs where we took less.

I ended up going around to half a dozen scrape artists and hairline-changers. There wasn't one of them who would come and look at Jack. Too hot, they said. It was the worst time of all, and even now I hate to think about it. Let's just say that me and Johnnie found out what Jesus felt like when Peter Pilot denied Him three times in the Garden of Gethsemane.

For a while, Jack was in and out of delirium, and then he was mostly in. He talked about his mother, and Harry Pierpont, and then about Boobie Clark, a fa-

mous fag from Michigan City we'd all known.

"Boobie tried to kiss me," Jack said one night, over and over, until I thought I'd go nuts. Johnnie never minded, though. He just sat there beside Jack on the cot, stroking his hair. He'd cut out a square of cloth in Jack's undershirt around the bullet hole, and kept painting it with Mercurochrome, but the skin had already turned gray-green, and a smell was coming out of the hole. Just a whiff of it was enough to make your eyes water.

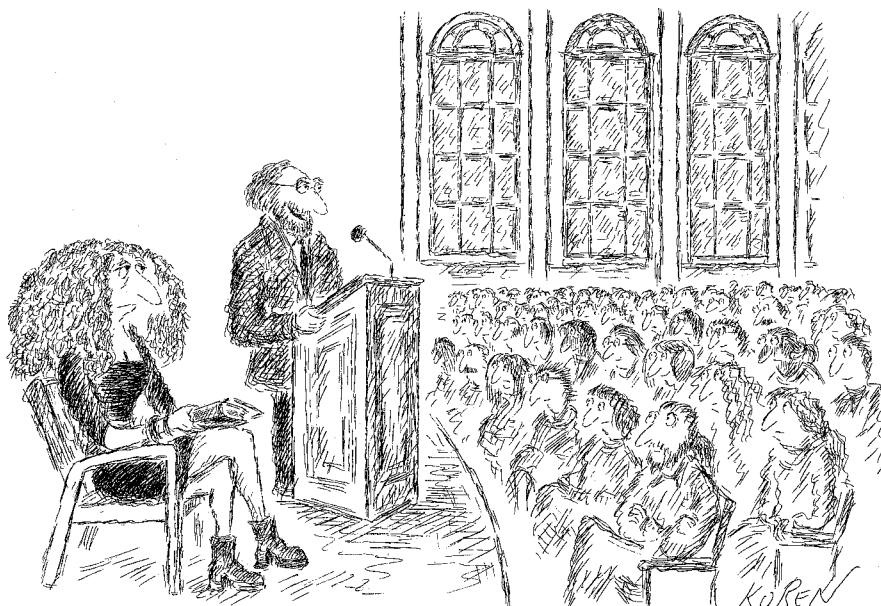
"That's gangrene," Mickey McClure said on a trip to pick up the rent. "He's a goner."

"He's no goner," Johnnie said.

Mickey leaned forward with his fat hands on his fat knees. He smelled Jack's breath like a cop with a drunk, then pulled back. "You better find a doc fast. Smell it in a wound, that's bad. Smell it on a man's breath..." Mickey shook his head and walked out.

"Fuck him," Johnnie said to Jack, still stroking his hair. "What does he know?"

Only, Jack didn't say nothing. He was asleep. A few hours later, after Johnnie and I had gone to sleep ourselves, Jack was on the edge of the bunk, raving about Henry Claudy, the warden at Michigan City. I-God Claudy, we used to call him, because it was always I-God I'll do this and I-God you'll do that. Jack was screaming that he'd kill Claudy if he didn't let us out. That got someone



"In addition to our speaker's many and considerable lifetime achievements, she is widely known as a piece of work!"



MY MOTHER

The most hateful words I have ever said to another human being were to my mother. I was sixteen at the time. They rose from the storm in my chest and I let them fall in a fury of hailstones: "I hate you. I wish I were dead." I waited for her to collapse, stricken by my cruel words, but she was still standing upright, her chin raised, her lips stretched in a crazy smile. "O.K., maybe I die," she said. "Then I no longer be your mother!"

We had many similar exchanges. Sometimes she actually tried to kill herself, by running into the street, holding a knife to her throat. She, too, had storms in her chest. And what she aimed at me was as fast and deadly as lightning bolts.

For days after our arguments, she would not speak to me. She tormented me, acted as if she had no feelings for me whatsoever. I was lost to her. And, because of that, I lost battle after battle, all of them: the times she criticized me, humiliated me in front of others, forbade me to do this or that without even listening to one good reason that it should be the other way. I swore to myself I would never forget these injustices. I would store them, harden my heart, make myself as impenetrable as she was.

I remember this now, because I am also remembering another time, just a couple of years ago. I was forty-seven, had become a different person by then, had gone on to be a fiction writer, someone who uses memory and imagination. In fact, I was writing a story about a girl and her mother when the phone rang.

It was my mother, and this surprised me. Had someone helped her make the call? For three years, she had been losing her mind to Alzheimer's disease. Early on, she forgot to lock her door. Then she forgot where she lived. She forgot who people were and what they

had meant to her. Lately, she had been unable to remember many of her worries and sorrows.

"Amy," she said, and she began to speak quickly in Chinese. "Something is wrong with my mind. I think I'm going crazy."

I caught my breath. Usually she could barely speak more than two words at a time. "Don't worry," I started to say.

"It's true," she went on. "I feel like I can't remember many things. I can't remember what I did yesterday. I can't remember what happened a long time ago, what I did to you . . ." She spoke as a person might if she were drowning and had bobbed to the surface with the force of the will to live, only to see how far she had already drifted, how impossibly far she was from the shore.

She spoke frantically: "I know I did something to hurt you."

"You didn't," I said. "Really, don't worry."

"I did terrible things. But now I can't remember what. And I just want to tell you . . . I hope you can forget just as I've forgotten."

I tried to laugh, so that she wouldn't notice the cracks in my voice. "Really, don't worry."

"O.K., I just wanted you to know."

After we hung up, I cried, both happy and sad. I was again a sixteen-year-old, but the storm in my chest was gone.

My mother died six months later. But she had bequeathed to me her most healing words, those which are as open and eternal as a clear blue sky. Together, we knew in our hearts what we should remember, what we can forget. ♦

pounding on the wall and yelling for us to shut that man up.

Johnnie sat next to Jack and talked to him and got him soothed down again.

"Homer?" Jack says after a while.

"Yes, Jack," I says.

"Won't you do the trick with the flies?" he asks.

I was surprised he remembered it. "Well," I says, "I'd be happy to, but there ain't no flies in here. Around these parts, flies ain't in season just yet."

In a low, hoarse voice, Jack sang, "There may be flies on some of you guys but there ain't no flies on me. Right, Chummah?"

I had no idea who Chummah was, but I nodded and patted his shoulder. It was hot and sticky. "That's right, Jack."

There were big purple circles under his eyes and dried spit on his lips. He was already losing weight. I could smell him, too. The smell of piss, which wasn't so bad, and the smell of gangrene, which was. Johnnie, though, never gave no sign that he smelled anything bad at all.

"Walk on your hands for me, John," Jack said. "Like you used to."

"In a minute," Johnnie said. He poured Jack a glass of water. "Drink this first. Wet your whistle. Then I'll see if I can still get across the room upside down. Remember when I used to run on my hands in the shirt factory? After I ran all the way to the gate, they stuck me in the hole."

"I remember," Jack said.

Johnnie didn't do no walking on his hands that night. By the time he got the glass of water to Jack's lips, the poor bugger had gone back to sleep with his head on Johnnie's shoulder.

"He's gonna die," I said.

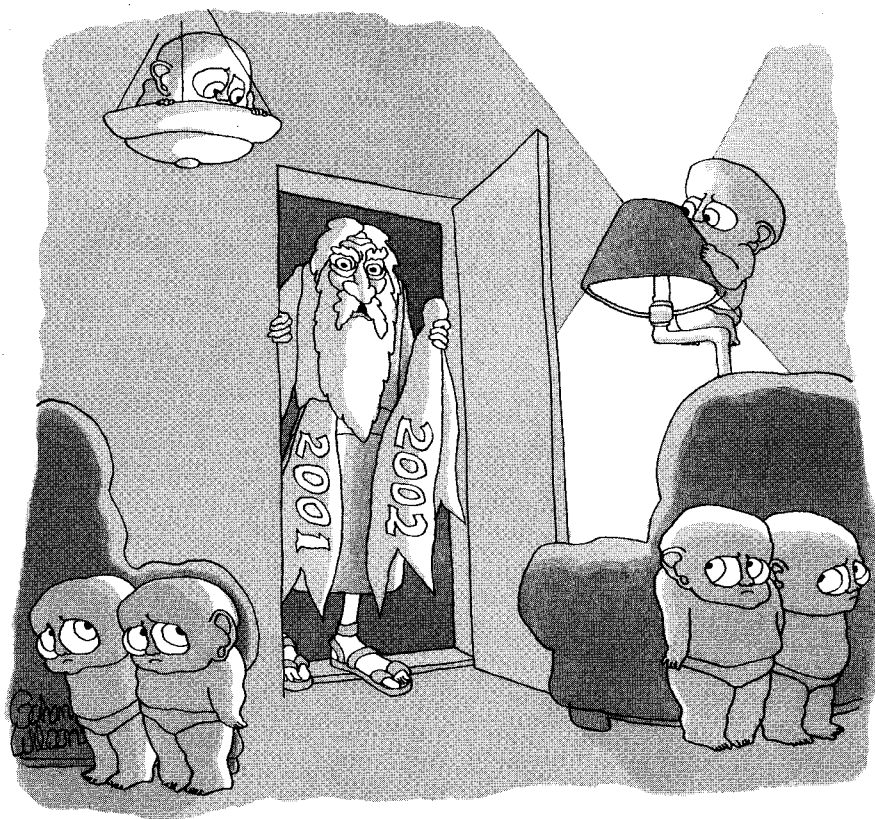
"He's not," Johnnie said.

The next morning, I asked Johnnie what we were going to do. What we could do.

"I got one more name out of McClure. Joe Moran. McClure says he was the go-between on the Bremer kidnapping. If he'll fix Jack up, it's worth a thousand to me."

"I got six hundred," I said. And I'd give it up, but not for Jack Hamilton. Jack had gone beyond needing a doctor; what Jack needed by then was a preacher. I did it for Johnnie Dillinger.

"Thanks, Homer," he said. "I'll be back in an hour. Meantime, you mind the



"Any volunteers?"

baby." But Johnnie looked bleak. He knew that if Moran wouldn't help us we'd have to get out of town. It would mean taking Jack back to St. Paul and trying there. And we knew what going back in a stolen Ford would likely mean. It was the spring of 1934 and all three of us—me, Jack, and especially Johnnie—were on J. Edgar Hoover's list of "public enemies."

"Well, good luck," I says. "See you in the funny pages."

He went out. I mooned around. I was mighty sick of the room by then. It was like being back in Michigan City, only worse. Because when you were in stir they'd done the worst they could to you. Here, hiding out in the back of Murphy's, things could always get worse.

Jack muttered, then he dropped off again.

There was a chair at the foot of the cot, with a cushion. I took the cushion and sat down beside Jack. It wouldn't take long, I didn't think. And when Johnnie came back I'd only have to say that poor old Jack took one final breath and just copped out. The cushion would be back on the chair. Really, it would

be doing Johnnie a favor. Jack, too.

"I see you, Chummah," Jack says suddenly. I tell you, it scared the living hell out of me.

"Jack!" I says, putting my elbows on that cushion. "How you doing?"

His eyes drifted closed. "Do the trick . . . with the flies," he says, and then he was asleep again. But he'd woken up at just the right time; if he hadn't, Johnnie would have found a dead man on that cot.

When Johnnie finally did come back, he practically busted down the door. I had my gun out. He saw it and laughed. "Put away the bean shooter, pal, and pack up your troubles in your old kit bag!"

"What's up?"

"We're getting out of here, that's what." He looked five years younger. "High time, wouldn't you say?"

"Yeah."

"He been all right while I was gone?"

"Yeah," I said. The cushion lying on the chair had "See You in Chicago" written on it in needlework.

"No change?"

"No change. Where are we going?"

"Aurora," Johnnie said. "It's a little town upstate. We're going to move in with Volney Davis and his girlfriend." He leaned over the cot. Jack's red hair, thin to start with, had started falling out. It was on the pillow, and you could see the crown of his head, white as snow. "You hear that, Jack?" Johnnie shouts. "We're hot now, but we're going to cool off quick! You understand?"

"Walk on your hands like Johnnie Dillinger used to," Jack said, without opening his eyes.

Johnnie just kept smiling. He winked at me. "He understands," he said. "He's just not awake. You know?"

"Sure," I said.

On the ride up to Aurora, Jack sat against the window, his head flying up and then thumping against the glass every time we hit a pothole. He was holding long, muttery conversations with folks we couldn't see. Once we were out of town, me and Johnnie had to roll down our windows. The smell was just too bad otherwise. Jack was rotting from the inside out, but he wouldn't die. I've heard it said that life is fragile and fleeting, but I don't believe it. It would be better if it was.

"That Dr. Moran was a crybaby," Johnnie said. We were in the woods by then, the city behind us. "I decided I didn't want no crybaby like him working on my partner. But I wasn't going to leave without something." Johnnie always travelled with a .38 pistol tucked into his belt. Now he pulled it out and showed it to me, the way he must have shown it to Dr. Moran. "I says, 'If I can't take away nothing else, Doc, I'll just have to take your life.' He seen I meant business, and he called someone up there. Volney Davis."

I nodded as if that name meant something to me. I found out later that Volney was another member of Ma Barker's gang. He was a pretty nice fella. So was Dock Barker. And Volney's girlfriend, the one they called Rabbits. They called her Rabbits because she dug herself out of prison a few times. She was the best of the lot. Aces. Rabbits, at least, tried to help poor old troublesome Jack. None of the others would—not the pill-rollers, the scrapers, the face artists, and certainly not Dr. Joseph (Crybaby) Moran.

The Barkers were on the run after a botched kidnapping; Dock's ma had al-

ready left—gone all the way to Florida. The hideout in Aurora wasn't much—four rooms, no electricity, a privy out back—but it was better than Murphy's saloon. And, like I say, Volney's girlfriend at least tried to do something. That was on our second night there.

She set up kerosene lamps all around the bed, then sterilized a paring knife in a pot of boiling water. "If you boys feel pukey," she said, "you just choke it back until I'm done."

"We'll be O.K.," Johnnie said. "Won't we, Homer?"

I nodded, but I was queasy even before she got going. Jack was laying on his stomach, head turned to the side, muttering. It seemed he never stopped. Whatever room he happened to be in was filled with people only he could see.

"I hope so," she says, "because once I start in, there's no going back." She looked up and seen Dock standing in the doorway. Volney Davis, too. "Go on, baldy," she says to Dock, "and take-um heap big chief with you." Volney Davis was no more a Indian than I was, but they used to rib him because he was born in the Cherokee Nation. Some judge had given him three years for stealing a pair of shoes, which was how he got into a life of crime.

Volney and Dock went out. When they were gone, Rabbits turned Jack over and then cut him open in a X, bearing down in a way I could barely stand to look at. I held Jack's feet. Johnnie sat beside his head, trying to soothe him, but it didn't do no good. When Jack started to scream, Johnnie put a dishtowel over his head and nodded for Rabbits to go on, all the time stroking Jack's head and telling him not to worry, everything would be just fine.

That Rabbits. They call them frails, but there was nothing frail about her. Her hands never even shook. Blood, some of it black and clotted, come pouring out of the sunken place when she cut it. She cut deeper and then out came the pus. Some was white, but there was big green chunks which looked like boogers. That was bad. But when she got to the lung the smell was a thousand times worse. It couldn't have been worse in France during the gas attacks.

Jack was gasping in these big whistling breaths. You could hear it in his throat, and from the hole in his back, too.

"You better hurry up," Johnnie says. "He's sprung a leak in his air hose."

"You're telling me," she says. "The bullet's in his lung. You just hold him down, handsome."

In fact, Jack wasn't thrashing much. He was too weak. The sound of the air shrieking in and out of him kept getting thinner and thinner. It was hotter than hell with those lamps set up all around the bed, and the stink of the hot oil was almost as strong as the gangrene. I wish we'd thought to open a window before we got started, but it was too late by then.

Rabbits had a set of tongs, but she couldn't get them in the hole. "Fuck this!" she cried, and tossed them to one side, and then stuck her fingers into the bloody hole, reached around until she found the slug that was in there, pulled it out, and threw it to the floor. Johnnie started to bend over for it and she said, "You can get your souvenir later, handsome. For now just hold him."

She went to work packing gauze into the mess she'd made.

Johnnie lifted up the dishtowel and peeked underneath it. "Not a minute too soon," he told her with a grin. "Old Red Hamilton has turned a wee bit blue."

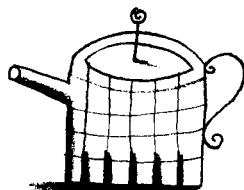
Outside, a car pulled into the driveway. It could have been the cops, for all we knew, but there wasn't nothing we could do about it then.

"Pinch this shut," she told me, and pointed at the hole with the gauze in it. "I ain't much of a seamstress, but I guess I can put in half a dozen."

I didn't want to get my hands anywhere near that hole, but I wasn't going to tell her no. I pinched it shut, and more watery pus ran out when I did. My mid-section clenched up and I started making this *gurk-gurk* noise. I couldn't help it.

"Come on," she says, kind of smiling. "If you're man enough to pull the trigger, you're man enough to deal with a hole." Then she sewed him up with these big, looping overhand strokes—really punching the needle in. After the first two, I couldn't look.

"Thank you," Johnnie told her when it was done. "I want you to know I'm going to take care of you for this."



"Don't go getting your hopes up," she says. "I wouldn't give him one chance in twenty."

"He'll pull through now," Johnnie says.

Then Dock and Volney rushed back in. Behind them was another member of the gang—Buster Daggs or Draggs, I can't remember which. Anyway, he'd been down to the phone they used at the Cities Service station in town, and he said the Gees had been busy back in Chicago, arresting anyone and everyone they thought might be connected to the Bremer kidnapping, which had been the Barker Gang's last big job. One of the fellas they took was John J. (Boss) McLaughlin, a high mucky-muck in the Chicago political machine. Another was Dr. Joseph Moran, also known as the Crybaby.

"Moran'll give this place up, just as sure as shit sticks to a blanket," Volney says.

"Maybe it's not even true," Johnnie says. Jack was unconscious now. His red hair lay on the pillow like little pieces of wire. "Maybe it's just a rumor."

"You better not believe that," Buster says. "I got it from Timmy O'Shea."

"Who's Timmy O'Shea? The Pope's butt-wiper?" Johnnie says.

"He's Moran's nephew," Dock says, and that kind of sealed the deal.

"I know what you're thinking, handsome," Rabbits says to Johnnie, "and you can stop thinking it right now. You put this fella in a car and go bumping him over those back roads between here and St. Paul, he'll be dead by morning."

"You could leave him," Volney says. "The cops show up, they'll have to take care of him."

Johnnie sat there, sweat running down his face in streams. He looked tired, but he was smiling. Johnnie was always able to find a smile. "They'd take care of him, all right," he says, "but they wouldn't take him to any hospital. Stick a pillow over his face and sit down on it, most likely." Which gave me a start, as I'm sure you'll understand.

"Well, you better decide," Buster says, "because they'll have this joint surrounded by dawn. I'm getting the hell out."

"You all go," Johnnie says. "You, too, Homer. I'll stay here with Jack."

"Well, what the hell," Dock says. "I'll stay, too."

"Why not?" Volney Davis says.

Buster Daggs or Draggs looked at them like they was crazy, but you know

what? I wasn't surprised a bit. That's just the effect Johnnie had on people.

"I'll stay, too," I says.

"Well, I'm getting out," Buster says.

"Fine," Dock says. "Take Rabbits with you."

"The hell you say," Rabbits pipes up. "I feel like cooking."

"Have you gone cuckoo?" Dock asks her. "It's one o'clock in the morning, and you're in blood right up to the elbows."

"I don't care what time it is, and blood washes off," she says. "I'm making you boys the biggest breakfast you ever ate—eggs, bacon, biscuits, gravy, hash browns."

"I love you, marry me," Johnnie says, and we all laughed.

"Oh, hell," Buster says. "If there's breakfast, I'll hang around."

Which is how we all wound up staying put in that Aurora farmhouse, ready to die for a man who was already—whether Johnnie liked it or not—on his way out. We barricaded the front door with a sofa and some chairs, and the back door with the gas stove, which didn't work anyway. Only the woodstove worked. Me and Johnnie got our tommy guns from the Ford, and Dock got some more from the attic. Also a crate of grenades, a mortar, and a crate of mortar shells. I bet the Army didn't have as much stuff in those parts as we did. Ha-ha!

"Well, I don't care how many of them we get, as long as that son of a bitch Melvin Purvis is one of them," Dock says. By the time Rabbits actually got the grub on the table, it was almost the time farmers eat. We took it in shifts, two men always watching the long driveway. Buster raised the alarm once and we all rushed to our places, but it was only a milk truck on the main road. The Gees never came. You could call that bad info; I called it more of John Dillinger's luck.

Jack, meanwhile, was on his not-so-merry way from bad to worse. By midafternoon of the next day, even Johnnie must have seen he couldn't go on much longer, although he wouldn't come right out and say so. It was the woman I felt bad for. Rabbits seen new pus oozing out between those big black stitches of hers, and she started crying. She just cried and cried. It was like she'd known Jack Hamilton her whole life.

"Never mind," Johnnie said. "Chin up, beautiful. You did the best you could. Besides, he might still come around."

"It's 'cause I took the bullet out with my fingers," she says. "I never should have done that. I knew better."

"No," I says, "it wasn't that. It was the gangrene. The gangrene was already in there."

"Bullshit," Johnnie said, and looked at me hard. "An infection, maybe, but no gangrene. There isn't any gangrene now."

You could smell it in the pus. There wasn't nothing to say.

Johnnie was still looking at me. "Remember what Harry used to call you when we were in Pendleton?"

I nodded. Harry Pierpont and Johnnie were always the best of friends, but Harry never liked me. If not for Johnnie, he never would've taken me into the gang, which was the Pierpont Gang to begin with, remember. Harry thought I was a fool. That was another thing Johnnie would never admit, or even talk about. Johnnie wanted everyone to be friends.

"I want you to go out and wrangle up some big 'uns," Johnnie says, "just like you used to when you was on the Pendleton mat. Some big old buzzers." When he asked for that, I knew he finally understood Jack was finished.

Fly-Boy was what Harry Pierpont used to call me at Pendleton Reformatory, when we were all just kids and I used to cry myself to sleep with my head under my pillow so the screws wouldn't hear. Well, Harry went on and rode the lightning in Ohio State, so maybe I wasn't the only fool.

Rabbits was in the kitchen, cutting up vegetables for supper. Something was simmering on the stove. I asked her if she had thread, and she said I knew god-dam well she did, hadn't I been right beside her when she sewed up my friend? You bet, I said, but that was black and I wanted white. Half a dozen pieces, about so long. And I held out my index fingers maybe eight inches apart. She wanted to know what I was going to do. I told her that if she was that curious she could watch right out the window over the sink.

"Ain't nothing out there but the privy," she says. "I got no interest in watching you do your personal business, Mr. Van Meter."

She had a bag hanging on the pantry door, and she rummaged through it and came out with a spool of white thread and cut me off six pieces. I thanked her kindly and then asked if she had a Band-Aid. She took some out of the drawer

right beside the sink—because, she said, she was always cutting her fingers. I took one, then went to the door.

I got in Pendleton for robbing wallets off the New York Central line with that same Charlie Makley—small world, ain't it? Ha! Anyhow, when it come to ways of keeping the bad boys busy, the Reformatory at Pendleton, Indiana, was loaded. They had a laundry, a carpentry shop, and a clothes factory where the dubs made shirts and pants, mostly for the guards in the Indiana penal system. Some called it the shirt shop; some called it the shit shop. That's what I drew—and met both Johnnie and Harry Pierpont. Johnnie and Harry never had any problem "making the day," but I was always coming up ten shirts short, or five pairs of trousers short, and being made to stand on the mat. The screws thought it was because I was always clowning around. Harry thought the same thing. The truth was that I was slow, and clumsy—which Johnny seemed to understand. That was why I played around.

If you didn't make your day, you had to spend the next day in the guardhouse, where there was a rush mat, about two feet square. You had to take off everything but your socks and then stand there all day. If you stepped off the mat once, you got your ass paddled. If you stepped off twice, a screw held you while another worked you over. Step off a third time and it was a week in solitary. You were allowed all the water you wanted to drink, but that was a trick, because you were allowed only one toilet break in the course of the day. If you were caught standing there with piss running down your leg, you got a beating and a trip to the hole.

It was boring. Boring at Pendleton, boring at Michigan City, I-God's prison for big boys. Some fellows told themselves stories. Some fellows sang. Some made lists of all the women they were going to screw when they got out.

Me, I taught myself to rope flies.

A privy's a damned fine place for fly-ropeing. I took up my station outside the door, then proceeded to make loops in the pieces of thread Rabbits had given me. After that, there was nothing to it except not moving much. Those

were the skills I'd learned on the mat. You don't forget them.

It didn't take long. Flies are out in early May, but they're slow flies. And anyone who thinks it's impossible to lasso a horsefly . . . well, all I can say is, if you want a challenge, try mosquitoes.

I took three casts and got my first one. That was nothing; there were times on the mat when I'd spend half the morning before I got my first. Right after I snagged him, Rabbits cried out, "What in God's name are you doing? Is it magic?"

From a distance, it *did* look like magic. You have to imagine how it appeared to her, twenty yards away: man standing by a privy throws out a little piece of thread—at nothing, so far as you can see—but, instead of drifting to the ground, the thread hangs in midair! It was attached to a good-sized horsefly. Johnnie would have seen it, but Rabbits didn't have Johnnie's eyes.

I got the end of the thread and taped it to the handle of the privy door with the Band-Aid. Then I went after the next one. And the next. Rabbits came out to get a closer look, and I told her that she could stay if she was quiet, and she tried, but she wasn't good at being quiet and finally I had to tell her she was scaring off the game and send her back inside.

I worked the privy for an hour and a half—long enough that I couldn't smell it anymore. Then it started getting cold, and my flies were sluggish. I'd got five. By Pendleton standards, that was quite a herd, although not that many for a man standing next to a shithouse. Anyway, I had to get inside before it got too cold for them to stay airborne.

When I came walking slowly through the kitchen, Dock, Volney, and Rabbits were all laughing and clapping. Jack's bedroom was on the other side of the house, and it was shadowy and dim. That was why I'd asked for white thread instead of black. I looked like a man with a handful of strings leading up to invisible balloons. Except that you could hear the flies buzzing—all mad and bewildered, like anything else that's been caught it don't know how.

"I be dog," Dock Barker says. "I mean it, Homer. Double dog. Where'd you learn to do that?"

"Pendleton Reformatory," I says.

"Who showed you?"

"Nobody," I said. "I just did it one day."

"Why don't they tangle the strings?" Volney asked. His eyes were as big as grapes. It tickled me, I tell you that.

"Dunno," I says. "They always fly in their own space and don't hardly ever cross. It's a mystery."

"Homer!" Johnnie yells from the other room. "If you got 'em, this'd be a good time to get in here with 'em!"

I started across the kitchen, tugging the flies along by their halters like a good fly cowboy, and Rabbits touched my arm. "Be careful," she says. "Your pal is going, and it's made your other pal crazy. He'll be better—after—but right now he's not safe."

I knew it better than she did. When Johnnie set his heart on a thing, he almost always got it. Not this time, though.

Jack was propped up on the pillows with his head in the corner, and although his face was white as paper, he was in his right mind again. He'd come around at the end, like folks sometimes do.

"Homer!" he says, just as bright as you could want. Then he sees the strings and laughs. It was a shrill, whistly laughter, not a bit right, and immediately he starts to cough. Coughing and laughing, all mixed together. Blood comes out of his mouth—some splattered on my

strings. "Just like Michigan City!" he says, and pounds his leg. More blood now, running down his chin and dripping onto his undershirt. "Just like old times!" He coughed again.

Johnnie's face looked terrible. I could see he wanted me to get out of the bedroom before Jack tore himself apart; at the same time, he knew it didn't matter a fiddler's fuck, and if this was a way Jack could die happy, looking at a handful of roped shithouse flies, then so be it.

"Jack," I says, "you got to be quiet."

"Naw, I'm all right now," he says, grinning and wheezing. "Bring 'em over here! Bring 'em over where I can see!" But before he could say any more he was coughing again, all bent over with his knees up, and the sheet, spattered with a spray of blood, like a trough between them.

I looked at Johnnie and he nodded. He'd passed beyond something in his mind. He beckoned me over. I went slowly, the strings in my hand, floating up, just white lines in the gloom. And Jack too tickled to know he was coughing his last.

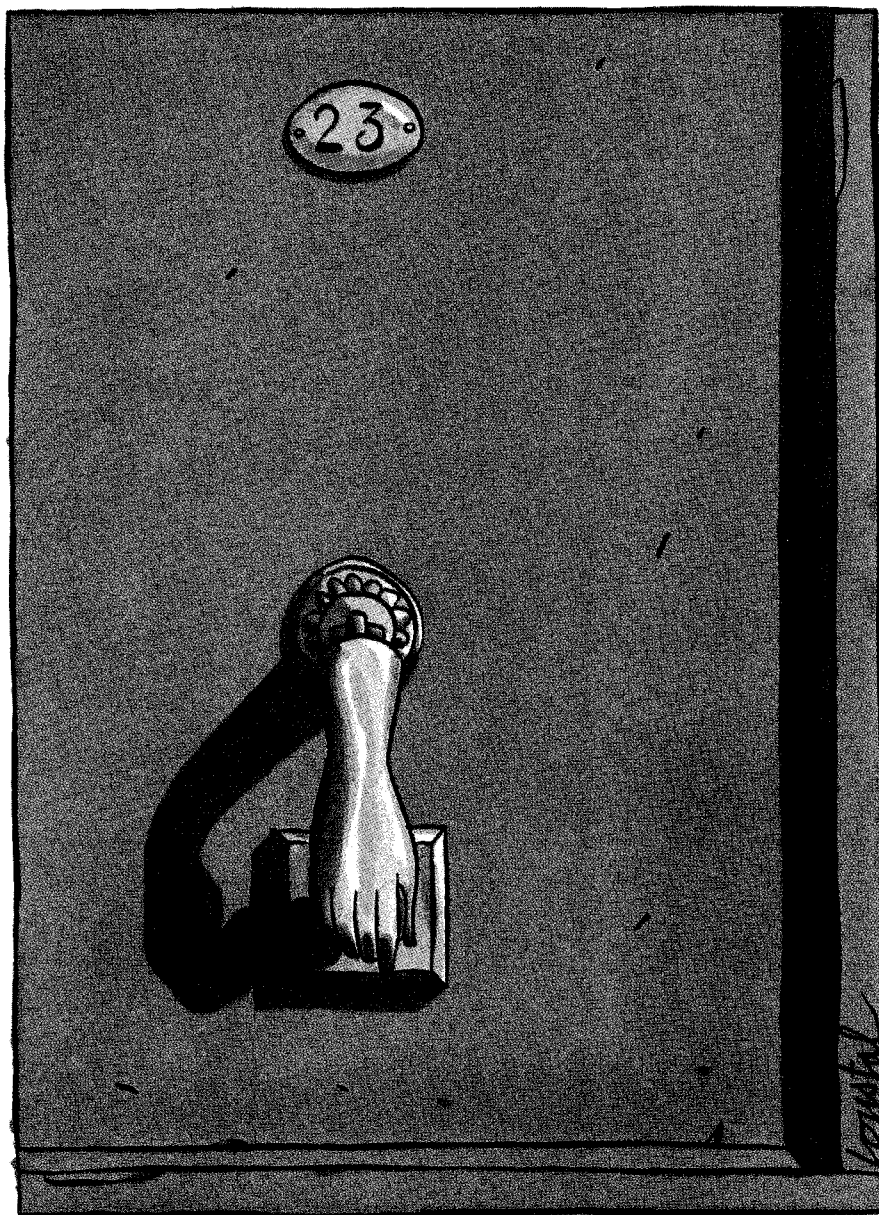
"Let 'em go," he says, in a wet and husky voice I could hardly understand. "I remember . . ."

And so I did. I let the strings go. For



"The only way you will be able to function here is if you think of yourself as having already been fired."

VISITING GEORGE



You remember: we were coming from a conference in that city, and I had just noticed that we were near the street, the block, where the old friends lived. I was thinking—about to say to you—we should drop in, it's been such a long time, we'll be a real surprise, back here again. There were so many people from so many ages, so many periods, approaching us on that London street.

In these ancient European cities, it is all there, in the gait, the shapes of noses and eyes and jowls, the elegant boots and plodding sandals—Shakespeare's audiences, Waterloo's veterans, the comportment of the bowler-hatted past, the slippered advance of the Oriental counter-immigration of the colonial era, the heads of punk purple-and-green-

striped hair, the sixties flower children, androgynous young shuffling in a drug daze, icons of the present, black faces that could be the indelible afterimage left, on the return to Africa, by our political exiles. All these, recognizable but not known, coming at us, coming at us.

And then he was singled out, for me. They shouldered around him on the pavement, but he was directed straight toward us. His paper carrier bag with the name of a specialty shop, his white curls like suds over thick earlobes—just the way he always was, returning from his pilgrimage for mangoes or a bottle of wine from the right slope of a small French vineyard. I saw him.

Wasn't it lovely? Because it was not true that everything changes. His image was him: the same.

We did go back to that Kensington flat with him. Didn't we? Its watercolors of Tuscan landscapes, engravings of early Cape Town, bold impasto oils by the black South African painters he used to discover, music cassettes spilled about, the journals and books to be cleared off the sofa so that you could sit. "Christ!" he said, this old unbeliever. "Where the hell have you been? People don't write letters anymore. We might all have been dead, for all we've heard of each other." He railed against whatever Conservative government it was (maybe still Thatcher). He who had left the Party after a visit to the Soviet Union in the fifties, when he was taken around collective pig farms. But I was thinking—perhaps thinking only now—we all have our point of no return in political loyalty, and the stink of pigs is as good as, say, the disillusion of corruption. He was once detained, back home in the old South Africa. He had paid his dues, earned his right to defect, I suppose, however we might have viewed the pretext.

You don't remember what we talked

about? Neither do I. Not really. There he still is, walking out of the weave of people, for us. The apartment: well, it was as we knew it. But she didn't appear. No. After so long, can one ask . . . ? Maybe asleep; she often said that she was an owl, not a lark, liked to lie late. If she's gone—dead or divorced? They've had their contingent loves, that's known. And not only the young have sexual freedom; people find new sexual partners at any age at all. We waited for him to say something.

But no, he didn't. There were no flowers in the room; she always had majestic vases of blooms and leaves.

So we didn't need any other evidence. Not there.

But perhaps she had just been too busy to buy any flowers that day, and he had forgotten her request and gone his usual route to pursue the fresh halibut or the mangoes or the restricted cultivar of a wine?

Will we ever know the significance of apparent trivial forgetfulness, what's ignored, in anyone's life—keys to the stages a relationship is passing through? You'll have to invent them. I can't help you. Because I couldn't ask him. Her name didn't come up at all, did it? That close couple, politically involved, risking themselves, never a policy disagreement between them, a stance in total solidarity, together over the years. Admirable, d'you remember! One commitment, one mind—he always said, "We are convinced, we declare ourselves." It was . . . enviable. Yes.

She didn't have to confirm. No? Ever. Did she?

He forgot the flowers, followed the quest for fish and wine. She wasn't there, or if she was . . .

So that's how it always really was. He made the opinions, created the "we," set the political itinerary. So it didn't—doesn't—matter whether she's mentioned or not, does it? You

are, I am, because we each have our opinions. We exist. Great thought comes to me, eh?

Oh, but you do at least remember that we did decide to drop by, having seen him come, known, an old friend out of the procession of all the unknown from everywhere who have lived in exile in London. Simply polite to stop by—one forgets old friends too easily.

It was a building unaffected by the decline of the borough in this section. Mirrors in the entrance, and the old lift behind its screen of wrought-iron scrolls. No. 23, it was, on the second floor, with the dove-gray door and a brass knocker in the form of a graceful hand. It struck the wood discreetly. Their souvenirs from France were more decorative than effective, and, as nobody responded, we pressed the bell. Ringing, ringing, questioning through the rooms we knew. It was a woman who opened the door, some woman, not her. The woman heard his name. She said, "Mr. S—died four years ago. My husband bought the flat then."

If I dreamt this, while walking, walking in the London streets, the subconscious of each and every other life, past and present, brushing me in passing, what makes it real?

Writing it down. ♦

a second or two, they stayed clumped together at the bottom—stuck together on the sweat from my palm—and then they drifted apart, hanging straight and upright in the air. I suddenly thought of Jack standing in the street after the Mason City bank job. He was firing his tommy gun and was covering me and Johnnie and Lester as we herded the hostages to the getaway car. Bullets flew all around him, and although he took a flesh wound, he looked like he'd live forever. Now he lay with his knees sticking up in a sheet filled with blood.

"Golly, look at 'em," he says as the white strings rose up, all on their own.

"That ain't all, either," Johnnie says. "Watch this." He then walked one step to the kitchen door, turned, and took a bow. He was grinning, but it was the saddest grin I ever saw in my life. All we did was the best we could; we couldn't very well give him a last meal, could we? "Remember how I used to walk on my hands in the shirt shop?"

"Yeah! Don't forget the spiel!" Jack says.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Johnnie says. "Now in the center ring for your delight and amazement, John Herbert Dillinger!" He said the "G" hard, the way his old man said it, the way he had said it himself before he got so famous. Then he clapped once and dived forward onto his hands. Buster Crabbe couldn't have done it better. His pants slid up to his knees, showing the tops of his stockings and his shins. His change come out of his pockets and rattled away across the boards. He started walking across the floor that way, limber as ever, singing "Tra-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!" at the top of his voice. The keys from the stolen Ford fell out of his pocket, too. Jack was laughing in these big hoarse gusts—like he had the flu—and Dock Barker and Rabbits and Volney, all crowded in the doorway, were also laughing. Fit to split. Rabbits clapped her hands and called "Bravo! Encore!" Above my head the white threads were still floating on, only drifting apart a little at a time. I was laughing along with the rest, and then I saw what was going to happen and I stopped.

"Johnnie!" I shouted. "Johnnie, look out for your gun! Look out for your gun!"

It was that goddam .38 he kept tucked into the top of his pants. It was working free of his belt.

"Huh?" he said, and then it dropped

onto the floor on top of the keys and went off. A .38 isn't the world's loudest gun, but it was loud enough in that back bedroom. And the flash was plenty bright. Dock yelled and Rabbits screamed. Johnnie didn't say nothing, just did a complete somersault and fell flat on his face. His feet came down with a crash, almost hitting the foot of the bed Jack Hamilton was dying in. Then he just lay there. I ran to him, brushing the white threads aside.

At first I thought he was dead, because when I turned him over there was blood all over his mouth and his cheek. Then he sat up. He wiped his face, looked at the blood, then looked at me.

"Holy shit, Homer, did I just shoot myself?" Johnnie says.

"I think you did," I says.

"How bad is it?"

Before I could tell him I didn't know, Rabbits pushed me to the side and wiped away the blood with her apron. She looked at him hard for a second or two, and then she says, "You're all right. It's just a scrape." Only we seen later, when she dabbed him up with the iodine, that it was actually two scrapes. The bullet cut through the skin over his lip on the right side, flew through maybe two inches of air, then it cut him again on the cheekbone, right beside his eye. After that it went into the ceiling, but before it did it plugged one of my flies. I know that's hard to believe, but it's true, I swear. The fly lay there on the floor in a little heap of white thread, nothing left of it but a couple of legs.

"Johnnie?" Dock says. "I think I got some bad news for you, partner." He didn't have to tell us what it was. Jack was still sitting up, but now his head was bowed over so far that his hair was touching the sheet between his knees. While we were checking to see how bad Johnnie was hurt, Jack had died.

Dock told us to take the body to a gravel pit about two miles further down the road, just past the Aurora town line. There was a bottle of lye under the sink, and Rabbits gave it to us. "You know what to do with this, don't you?" she asks.

"Sure," Johnnie says. He had one of her Band-Aids stuck on his upper lip, over that place where his mustache never grew in later on. He sounded listless and he wouldn't meet her eye.

TO IMPATIENCE

Don't wish your life away
my mother said and I saw
past her words that same day
suddenly not there
nor the days after
even the ones I remember

and though hands held back the hounds
on the way to the hunt
now the fleet deer are gone
that bounded before them
all too soon overtaken
as she knew they would be

and well as she warned me
always calling me home
to the moment around me
that was taking its good time
and willingly though I
heeded her words to me
once again waking me
to the breath that was there

"Make him do it, Homer," she says, then jerked her thumb toward the bedroom, where Jack was laying wrapped up in the bloodstained sheet. "If they find that one and identify him before you get clear, it'll make things just so much worse for you. Us, too, maybe."

"You took us in when nobody else would," Johnnie says, "and you won't live to regret it."

She gave him a smile. Women almost always fell for Johnnie. I'd thought this one was an exception because she was so businesslike, but now I seen she wasn't. She'd just kept it all business because she knew she wasn't much in the looks department. Also, when a bunch of men with guns are cooped up like we

were, a woman in her right mind doesn't want to make trouble among them.

"We'll be gone when you get back," Volney says. "Ma keeps talking about Florida, she got her eye on a place in Lake Weir—"

"Shut up, Vol," Dock says, and gives him a hard poke in the shoulder.

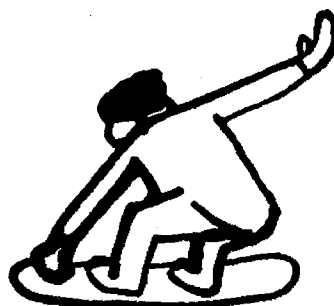
"Anyway, we're gettin' out of here," he says, rubbing the sore place. "You ought to get out, too. Take your luggage. Don't even pull in on your way back. Things can change in a hurry."

"O.K.," Johnnie says.

"At least he died happy," Volney says. "Died laughin'."

I didn't say nothing. It was coming home to me that Red Hamilton—my old running buddy—was really dead. It made me awful sad. I turned my mind to how the bullet had just grazed Johnnie (and then gone on to kill a fly instead), thinking that would cheer me up. But it didn't. It only made me feel worse.

Dock shook my hand, then Johnnie's. He looked pale and glum. "I don't know how we ended up like this, and that's the truth," he says. "When I was a boy, the



you too kept whispering
 up close to my ear
 the secrets of hunger
 for some prize not yet there
 sight of face touch of skin
 light in another valley
 labor triumphant or
 last word of a story
 without which you insisted
 the world would not be complete
 soon soon you repeated
 it cannot come too soon

yet you know it can
 and you know it would be
 the end of you too only
 if ever it arrives
 you find something else missing
 and I know I must thank you
 for your faithful discontent
 and what it has led me to
 yes yes you have guided me
 but what is hard now to see
 is the mortal hurry

—W.S. Merwin

only goddam thing I wanted was to be a railroad engineer.”

“Well, I’ll tell you something,” Johnnie says. “We don’t have to worry. God makes it all come right in the end.”

We took Jack on his last ride, wrapped up in a bloodstained sheet and pushed into the back of that stolen Ford. Johnnie drove us to the far side of the pit, all bump and jounce (when it comes to rough riding, I’ll take a Terraplane over a Ford any day). Then he killed the engine and touched the Band-Aid riding his upper lip. He says, “I used up the last of my luck today, Homer. They’ll get me now.”

“Don’t talk like that,” I says.

“Why not? It’s true.” The sky above us was white and full of rain. I reckoned we’d have a muddy splash of it between Aurora and Chicago (Johnnie had decided we should go back there because the Feds would be expecting us in St. Paul). Somewhere crows was calling. The only other sound was the ticktock of the cooling engine. I kept looking into the mirror at the wrapped-up body in the back seat. I could see the bumps

of elbows and knees, the fine red spatters where he’d bent over, coughing and laughing, at the end.

“Look at this, Homer,” Johnnie says, and points to the .38, which was tucked back in his belt. Then he twiddled Mr. Francis’s key ring with the tips of his fingers, where the prints were growing back in spite of all his trouble. There were four or five keys on the ring besides the one to the Ford. And that lucky rabbit’s foot. “Butt of the gun hit this when it come down,” he says. He nodded his head. “Hit my very own lucky piece. And now my luck’s gone. Help me with him.”

We lugged Jack to the gravel slope. Then Johnnie got the bottle of lye. It had a big brown skull and crossbones on the label.

Johnnie knelt down and pulled the sheet back. “Get his rings,” he says, and I pulled them off. Johnnie put them in his pocket. We ended up getting forty-five dollars for them in Calumet City, although Johnnie swore up and down that the little one had a real diamond in it.

“Now hold out his hands.”

I did, and Johnnie poured a cap of lye over the tip of each finger. That was one

set of prints wasn’t ever going to come back. Then he leaned over Jack’s face and kissed him on the forehead. “I hate to do this, Red, but I know you’d do the same to me if it’d gone the other way.”

He then poured the lye over Jack’s cheeks and mouth and brow. It hissed and bubbled and turned white. When it started to eat through his closed eyelids, I turned away. And of course none of it done no good; the body was found by a farmer after a load of gravel. A pack of dogs had knocked away most of the stones we covered him with and were eating what was left of his hands and face. As for the rest of him, there were enough scars for the cops to I.D. him as Jack Hamilton.

It was the end of Johnnie’s luck, all right. Every move he made after that—right up to the night Purvis and his badge-carrying gunsels got him at the Biograph—was a bad one. Could he have just thrown up his hands that night and surrendered? I’d have to say no. Purvis meant to have him dead one way or the other. That’s why the Gees never told the Chicago cops Johnnie was in town.

I’ll never forget the way Jack laughed when I brought them flies in on their strings. He was a good fellow. They all were, mostly—good fellows who got into the wrong line of work. And Johnnie was the best of the bunch. No man ever had a truer friend. We robbed one more bank together, the Merchants National in South Bend, Indiana. Lester Nelson joined us on that caper. Getting out of town, it seemed like every hick in Indiana was throwing lead at us, and we still got away. But for what? We’d been expecting more than a hundred grand, enough to move to Mexico and live like kings. We ended up with a lousy twenty thousand, most of it in dimes and dirty dollar bills.

God makes it all come right in the end, that’s what Johnnie told Dock Barker just before we parted company. I was raised a Christian—I admit I fell away a bit along my journey—and I believe that: we’re stuck with what we have, but that’s all right; in God’s eyes, none of us are really much more than flies on strings and all that matters is how much sunshine you can spread along your way. The last time I seen Johnnie Dillinger was in Chicago, and he was laughing at something I said. That’s good enough for me. ♦

PASSEUR

BY JOHN BERGER

It was not a hotel. It was a kind of pension where, at the most, there were four or five guests. In the morning, breakfast on a tray was placed on a shelf in the corridor: bread, butter, honey, and slices of a sausage that is a specialty of the city. Beside the tray, there were packets of Nescafé and an electric kettle. Contact with the severe and serene young women who ran the place was minimal.

In the bedroom, all the furniture, made of either oak or walnut, was old and must have dated from before the Second World War. This was the only major Polish city to have survived the war without its buildings being seriously damaged. In the pension, there was a sense, as in a convent or a monastery, that people had been contemplatively looking through the two windows which gave onto the streets for generations.

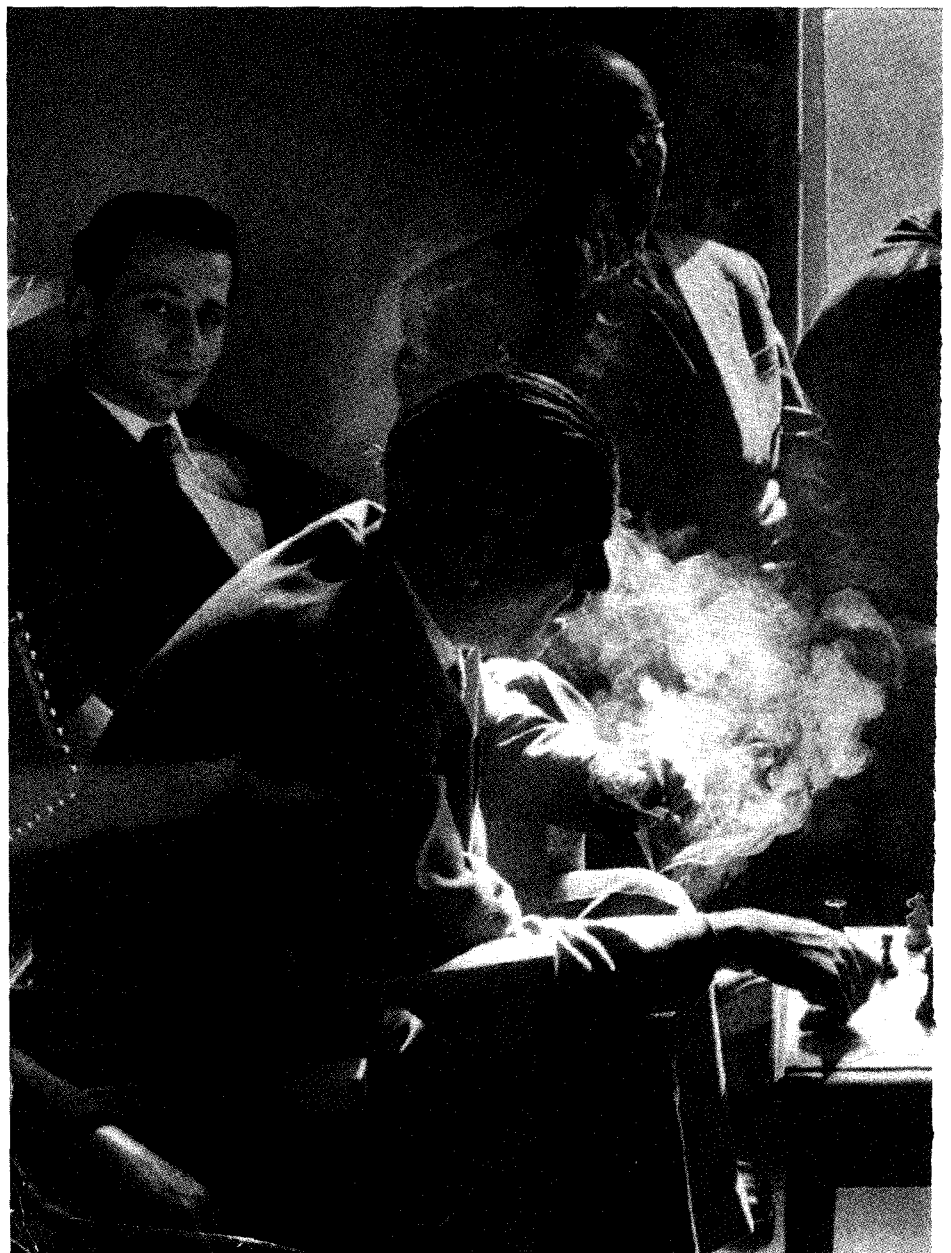
The building was on Miodowa Street in Kazimierz, the old Jewish quarter of Kraków. After breakfast, I asked a young woman behind the reception desk where I might find the nearest bank machine. She had a violin case in her hands. She put it down with a show of irritation, and picked up a tourist map of the city. She marked in pencil where I had to go. It's not far, she said, sighing regretfully, as if she wished she were sending me to the other side of the world. I bowed discreetly, opened and shut the front door, turned right, took the first right again, and found myself in the Plac Nowy, an open market square.

I have never been in this square before and yet I know it by heart, or, rather, I know by heart the people who are selling things in it. Some of them have regular stalls with awnings to keep the sun off their goods. It is already hot, hot with the blurred, gnat heat of the Eastern European plains and forest. A foliage heat. A heat without the Mediterranean's assurance. Here nothing is certain. The nearest thing to certainty here is a grandmother.

Other sellers—all of them women—have come from the outlying villages with their own produce in baskets or buckets and do not have stalls. They sit on stools they brought with them. A few stand.

Lettuces, red radishes, horseradishes, dill like green lace, small knobby cucumbers (which in this heat grow in three

days), new potatoes (their skins with a little powdered earth on them, the color of grandchildren's knees), celery with its cleansing toothbrush smell, cuttings of *livèche* (which the men, drinking vodka, swear is an incomparable aphrodisiac), bunches of young carrots carried home from school by children with Polish blue eyes, cut roses (mostly yellow), cottage



cheeses that the rags pegged to the clothesline in the garden still smell of wild green asparagus that the children were sent to look for near the village cemetery.

The women on their stools sit, saying nothing. They are immobile, expressionless, and rely on their own simple presence to guarantee the quality of what they have brought to sell from their own gardens—surrounded by wooden fences, behind two-roomed houses made from logs, with single stoves (covered in tiles) between the two rooms. The women live in *chatas* like this.

I wander among them. Different ages. Different builds. Eyes of different colors. No two women wearing the same kerchief. But each one with her own way

of protecting or favoring the small of her back as she bends—the earth is such a long way down—to cut chives or pull out dogtooth weed. When they were younger, their hips absorbed the shock of events; now it is their shoulders.

I peer into the basket of a woman who is standing; she has no stool. The basket is full of pale-golden pastries. They look like carved chessmen. Each one is about six inches high.

I pick up a castle and realize my mistake. It is too heavy to be made of pastry.

I glance up at the face of the woman. Sixty years old, blue-green eyes. She looks back at me severely, as if at an idiot. *Oscypek*, she says slowly. It's the name of a cheese made from the milk of mountain sheep and smoked in the chimney

between the two rooms. I buy three. Then, with the smallest gesture of her head, she suggests I get on my way.

In the center of the square stands a low building, divided into small, round shops. There is a barber's with one chair. Several butchers. A grocer's where you can buy pickled cabbage from a barrel. A kitchen with a cast-iron stove where you can get soup, and, outside on the paving stones, three wooden tables with benches. At one of them, a man with slightly dejected shoulders is sitting. He has long hands and a high forehead, which seems even higher because he is going bald. His spectacles have thick lenses. I know this man. Although he is not Polish, he looks at home here this morning. He has a bowl of borscht.

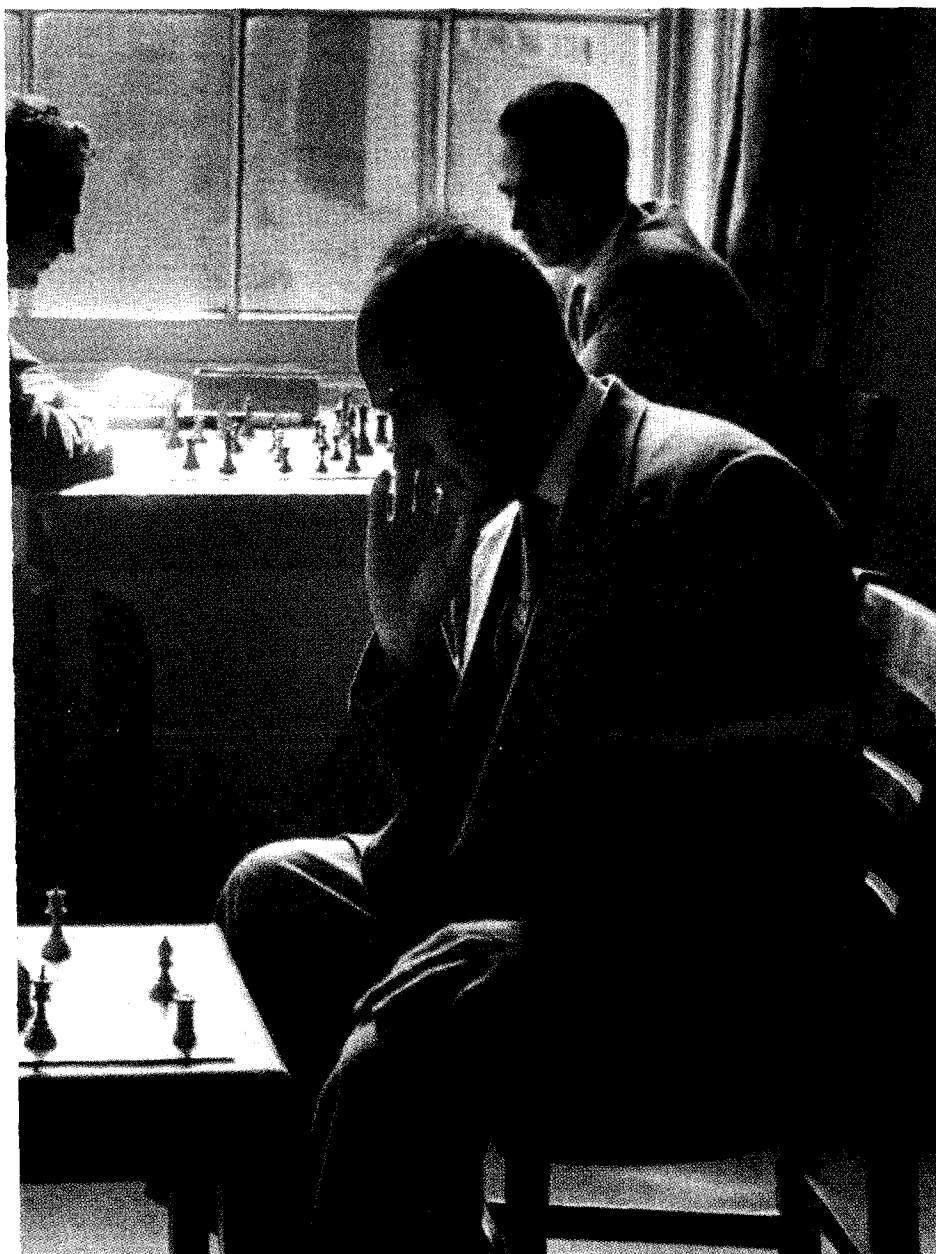
Ken was born in New Zealand and died there. I sit on the bench opposite him. This man, sixty years ago, shared with me what he knew, although he never told me how he'd learned it. He never spoke about his childhood or his parents. I had the impression he left New Zealand for Europe when he was young, before he was twenty.

Distances never daunted him. Wellington, Paris, New York, London, Norway, Spain, and, at some moment, I think, Burma or India. He earned his living, variously, as a journalist, a schoolteacher, a dance instructor, an extra in films, a gigolo, a bookseller without a shop, a cricket umpire. In Paris, he drew cartoons for a newspaper. I remember distinctly the kind of toothbrushes he liked—ones with extra-long handles—and the size of his shoe (44).

He pushes his bowl of soup toward me, then takes a handkerchief from his trouser pocket, wipes the spoon, and hands it to me. I recognize the black tartan handkerchief. The soup is a clear, deep-red vegetable borscht, with a little apple vinegar added to it, Polish style, to counter the natural sweetness of the beetroot. I eat some and push the bowl back and hand him the spoon. No word has passed between us.

From the bag slung over my shoulder I take out a sketchbook. I want to show him a drawing I made yesterday, from Leonardo's "Lady with an Ermine," in the Czartoryski Museum. He studies it, his heavy glasses slipping a little down his nose.

Pas mal! Yet isn't she too upright? Isn't



she in fact leaning more as she takes the corner?

When I hear him speak—the manner is so indisputably his—my love for him returns, my love for his journeys, his appetites (which he set out to satisfy and never suppressed), his weariness, his sad curiosity.

Yes, a little too upright, he repeats. Never mind. Every copy has to change something, doesn't it?

And my love for his lack of illusions. Being without illusions, he avoided disillusionment.

When I first met him, I was eleven and he was forty. For the next six or seven years, he was the most influential person in my life. It was with him that I learned to cross frontiers. In French there is the word *passeur*—often translated as “ferryman” or “smuggler,” but with the connotation of a guide and something of the mountains. He was my *passeur*.

Ken flips through the sketchbook. He had deft fingers and could palm cards skillfully. He puts a finger between two pages and stops.

Another copy? Antonello da Messina? “Dead Christ Supported by Angel,” I say.

Antonello, he says. If I could choose to have my portrait painted by any artist in history, I'd choose him. He painted as though printing words. Everything he did had that kind of coherence and authority, and it was during his lifetime that the first printing presses were invented.

He looks down again at the sketch.

Not a trace of pity on the angel's face, he says, only tenderness. You've caught that tenderness, but not the gravity, the gravity of the first printed words. That's gone for good.

I did it last year in the Prado. Until the guards came to chuck me out.

Anyone has the right to draw there, no?

Yes, but not to sit on the floor.

Then why didn't you draw standing up!

When Ken says this, in the Plac Nowy, I see him, tall, stooped, standing on the edge of a cliff, drawing the sea. Somewhere near Brighton, the summer of 1939. He always had in his pocket a large black graphite pencil called a Black Prince, which, instead of being round, was rectangular, like a carpenter's pencil.

I'm too old now, I tell him, to draw for a long time standing up.

He puts down the sketchbook abruptly.

He abhorred self-pity. The weakness, he said, of many intellectuals. Avoid it! His only moral imperative.

He fingers one of the cheeses I have bought.

Her name is Jagusia, he says, nodding in the direction of the woman with the basket, and she comes from the mountains, in Podhale. Her two sons work in Germany. Black-market labor. Hard for them to get work permits; they're forced to be illegal. *Néanmoins*, they're building a house, one larger than Jagusia has even dreamt of, with three stories and not two rooms but seven!

Néanmoins! French words crop up in his sentences. He had lived in Paris before coming to London, and the French years were the happiest of his life—he sometimes wore a black beret.

Yet Jagusia will refuse, he prophesies, to move out of her *chata*, with the cheesecloths on the line in the garden.

This was the man who made me believe that together we could find the magic in any city.

What about a beer? he says, pointing toward the far end of the market.

The cans of beer are in a stall with dried beans, mustard, biscuits, honey bread, and tinned meats. There is also an open chessboard and a game in progress. The grocer behind the stand is playing black, and a man who looks like a passerby is playing white. Several pawns, a knight, and a bishop have been taken.

I ask for two beers. White moves his queen and says, “Check!”

Black takes my money and moves a knight.

The queen withdraws.

A woman customer asks for some of the honey bread, which has sweet candied oranges buried in it. Black cuts the slices and weighs them.

White makes a careless move and realizes too late what he's done. He swallows hard. Black takes a castle.

Kraków's Jewish ghetto, on the other side of the Vistula, is less than ten minutes from here. The ghetto, an area of a small city block, was sealed off by walled-up buildings, blockades, and barbed wire, and, six months later, eighteen thousand people were imprisoned there. Thousands died from disease and malnutrition each month. Only those fit enough to work as slave labor in the

German armament or clothing factories were permitted to leave for their shifts. All other trespassers outside the ghetto were shot, as were any Poles who helped them or hid them.

Tyskie! Ken applauds when I return to the table. You chose the best beer!

Early training, I say.

He's called Zedrek, Ken says, the man you were watching playing chess. He plays with Abram, the grocer, at least once a week. Zedrek could play a good game if he hadn't started drinking vodka so early. I don't think he can stop, though. Abram was a small boy in the war and survived in hiding.

Ken taught me most of the games I know: chess, snooker, darts, billiards, poker, table tennis, backgammon. Chess we played in his bed-sit, the others in bars. Bridge, which I had learned before I met him, we played with my parents or when we got invited to somebody's house, which was not often.

He was a replacement teacher in the lunatic boarding school into which I had been bundled. In front of the school assembly—fifty bare-kneed, cowed boys, each trying to find, unaided, a sense to life—the apoplectic headmaster was in a rage and had thrown a dining-room chair at the Latin teacher, and Ken, who happened to be between them, caught it in mid-flight with one hand. That was how I first noticed him. He set the chair down, put his feet up on it, and the headmaster, undeterred, continued with his harangue. This was 1937.

On the final day of the term, I invited him to stay with me and my parents. They had a caravan on a beach, near Selsey Bill in Sussex.

Why not? he said. And he came for a week.

My father was pleased: with Ken, we were a foursome, and we could play bridge together.

Ken shuffled the pack and the cards cascaded between his two hands held far apart. Sometimes the cascade looked like a moving staircase—an escalator—or a playing-cards ladder. Once, later, he said to me when I was complaining of not being able to go to sleep: Imagine you're shuffling a pack of cards! That's how I go to sleep.

My father was a good player, and he enjoyed the game. The game also allowed him to recall certain easy mo-

ments with the dead, who otherwise haunted him. When the four of us were playing in Selsey, six diamonds doubled took precedence over five mortars lost. He was playing with us and with a roll of infantry officers of whom he was the only survivor after four years in the trenches near Vimy Ridge and Ypres.

My mother recognized that Ken belonged to what for her was the special category of people "who loved Paris." She foresaw, I'm sure, that the *passeur* was going to take me a long way away and, at the same time, she didn't doubt that I was, more or less, capable of looking after myself. On Monday, the wash day, she offered to launder and iron Ken's clothes, and he, in turn, bought her a bottle of Dubonnet.

I accompanied Ken to bars. I was underage, but nobody objected. It wasn't my size or looks but my certainty. Don't look back, he had told me, don't doubt for a moment—just be surer of yourself than they are.

Once, when another drinker started swearing at me, telling me to get my bloody mouth out of his sight, I broke down. Ken put his arm around me and took me straight into the street. This was in wartime London, and there were no lights. We walked a long way in silence. If you have to cry, he said finally, and sometimes you can't help it, you have to cry *afterward*, never *during*! Remember this. Unless you're with those who love you and only those who love you—and in that case you're already lucky, for there are never many who love you—then you can cry during. Otherwise you cry *afterward*.

Except for his shortsightedness, he moved like an athlete. Not me. I was clumsy, overhasty, cowardly, with almost no poise. I had something else, though, a kind of determination, which, given my age, was startling. I would wager all! And for the energy of that rashness he overlooked the rest. And the gift of his love was the gift of sharing with me what he knew, almost everything he knew, irrespective of my age or his. For such a gift to be possible, the giver and the receiver need to be equal, and we, this strange incongruous couple, somehow became equal. Neither of us understood how this happened. Now we do. We were foreseeing this moment, here in the Plac Nowy. We anticipated my being an old man and his being dead, and this allowed us to be equal.

He puts his long hand around the



"Highlight the battleship-gray."

can of beer and clinks it against mine.

He always preferred gestures to spoken words. Perhaps as a result of his respect for silent, read words. He studied in libraries, and yet, for him, the immediate place for a book was a raincoat pocket. And the books he pulled out of that pocket! He did not hand them to me directly. He said the name of the author and the title, and placed the book on the corner of the mantelpiece in his bedroom. Sometimes there were several, so that I might choose. George Orwell, "Down and Out in Paris and London"; Marcel Proust, "Swann's Way"; Katherine Mansfield, "The Garden Party"; Laurence Sterne, "The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman"; Henry Miller, "Tropic of Cancer." Neither of us believed in literary explanations. I never once asked him about what I couldn't understand. He never referred to what, given my age and experience, I might find difficult. Sir Frederick Treves, "The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences." James Joyce, "Ulysses" (an English edition published in Paris). There was a tacit belief between us that we could learn—or should try to learn—how to live partly from books. Oscar Wilde, "De Profundis." St. John of the Cross.

When I returned a book, I felt closer to him. Books converged us.

Ken was the first person to talk to me about the Spanish Civil War. Open wounds, he said, nothing can stanch them. I had never heard the word "stanch" pronounced out loud before. We were at that moment playing billiards in a bar. Don't forget to chalk the cue, he added.

He read to me in Spanish a poem by García Lorca, who had been shot four years earlier, and, when he translated it, I believed, in my fourteen-year-old mind, that I knew—except for a few details—what life was about and what had to be risked to live it.

Two girls in long white lace dresses are crossing the far end of the Plac Nowy. They are ten or eleven years old, but they are both tall for their age.

La semaine blanche, Ken says. Last Sunday, kids across the whole of Poland took their First Communion. And every day this week they do their best to get to church and take Communion once more, particularly the girls, who then get to wear their white Communion dresses another time.

The two girls walk side by side, scything down the men whose glances they are attracting. They've become Honorary Women. As they cross the square, they are stepping out of their childhoods.

They're going to the Church of Cor-

pus Christi, Ken says. All the girls of Kraków want to take their First Communion at the Church of Corpus Christi, because the Communion dresses there have the best cut.

A woman carrying a basket of wild sorrel passes our table.

Could you make us some sorrel soup? Ken asks me. We could have it tomorrow instead of borscht.

I guess so.

With eggs?

No, that I don't know.

Well, he shuts his eyes, you prepare the soup, serve it, and in each bowl you put a hot hard-boiled egg. You then cut the egg into slices, and eat it with the green soup. The mixture—sharp green acidity and the round comfort of the egg—reminds you of something extraordinary and far away.

Of home?

Certainly not, not even for the Poles.

Of what, then?

Of survival, perhaps.

It seems to me that Ken always lived in the same bed-sit. In reality, he moved often, but the moves were made when I was away at school and, on returning and going to see him, I would find his same few possessions piled up on a similar table at the foot of a similar bed, behind a door with a key, which opened onto a staircase, overlooked by a landlady, always worrying in the same way about the lights being left on.

Ken's room had a gas fire and a tall

window. On the mantelpiece were the books. On the table by the window was a large portable wireless (the word "radio" was rarely used). September 1st. I remember that we were both listening: The Panzer Divisions of the Wehrmacht invaded Poland without warning this morning at dawn.

In the room's wardrobe he kept not only clothes but food: oatmeal biscuits, hard-boiled eggs, a pineapple, coffee. Attached to the gas fire was a ring for heating water in a saucepan that he kept on the windowsill. The room smelled of cigarettes, fruit, and lighter fluid. The toilet and washbasin were on the landing. It was either on the landing above or the one below; I tended to forget, and he would have to shout after me: Up, not down!

His two suitcases, which he left open on the floor, were never entirely unpacked. (At that time, nothing was unpacked, even in people's heads. Everything was in storage or in transit. Dreams were kept on luggage racks.) In one of his suitcases there was a jar of honey from Brittany, a dark fisherman's sweater, a volume of Baudelaire, and a table-tennis paddle.

Give you a lead of fifteen plus service, he proposed. Ready? Serve! Fifteen-love. Fifteen-one. Fifteen-two. Fifteen-three. That was in 1940.

By 1941 he was still beating me two games out of three, but he was no longer giving me a lead.

He was working then in some capacity for a foreign service at the BBC

(about which he would say nothing). He often came back to the room after work in the small hours of the morning. The bedcover was damask.

In the mornings, we took breakfast in a barricaded café near Gloucester Road. Food was rationed. Those without a sweet tooth gave their sugar rations to others. Ken and I drank tea, for it was better than the coffee essence. Over breakfast we read newspapers. Each consisted of four or, at the most, six pages.

September 15, 1941: Leningrad cut off by German troops.

February 12, 1942: Three German cruisers made it through the Strait of Dover.

May 28th: The Wehrmacht has taken two hundred and fifty thousand Soviet prisoners at Kharkov.

The Nazis, Ken said, are making the same mistake as Napoleon. They underestimate the power of General Winter. He was right, of course. In late November, General Paulus and his Sixth Army were surrounded at Stalingrad, and in February they surrendered to General Zhukov.

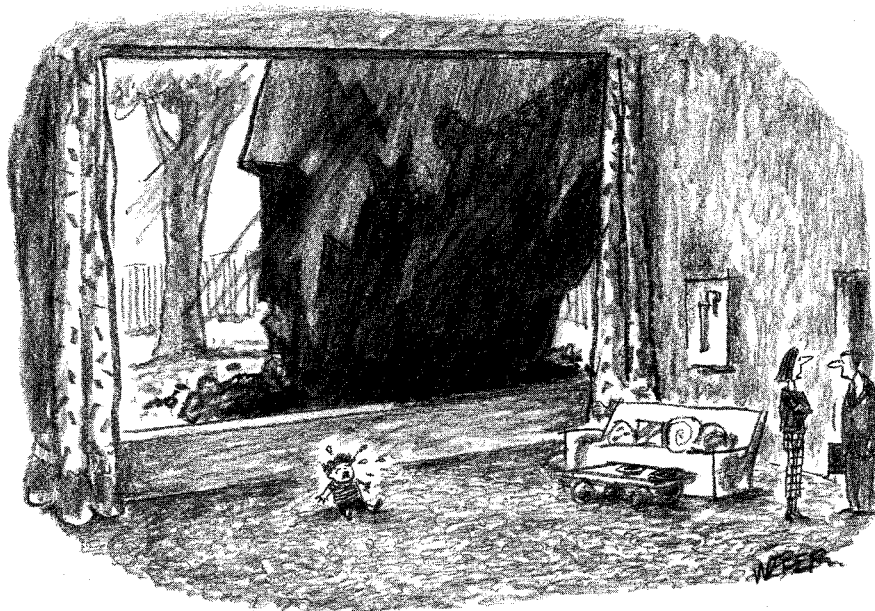
One morning in April, 1943, Ken told me about a London radio broadcast, made the day before, by General Sikorski, the Polish Prime Minister in exile, who was appealing to Poles in Poland to support the ongoing uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. The ghetto was being systematically annihilated. Sikorski said (I remember Ken's speaking slowly), "The greatest crime in the history of mankind is taking place."

Only during moments when you found yourself thinking about nothing did the enormity of what was happening make itself felt. The enormity was then present in the air, under the spring sky, addressing a seventh sense which I still cannot name.

Beneath the damask bedcover, during nights punctuated by air-raid sirens, I sometimes felt a burning in Ken's erect member. The tumescence came unasked and waited like a pain, a pain that had to be stanchd, low down in the middle of his long body. Soon afterward, in the bed damp with spunk and tears from his eyes without glasses, sleep came swiftly to the two of us. Rippled sleep, like sand, when the tide was far out.

Let's go and see the pigeons, Ken says, polishing the thick lenses of his glasses with his tartan handkerchief.

We walk toward the northern end of



"Poor Zachary. A meteorite squashed his swing set."

the market. The sun is hot. One more early-summer morning added to the pile on the century's desk. We watch two butterflies, which came to the center of the city with the garden vegetables, fly upward in a spiral. The clock on the city cathedral strikes eleven.

Every day, hundreds of Polish visitors climb the spiral stone staircase in the bell tower of the cathedral to touch the massive tongue of the Zygmunt bell, cast in 1520 and weighing eleven tons. Touching the bell, it is said, brings luck in love.

We pass a man selling hair dryers. A hundred and fifty zlotys each; they have probably been stolen. He is demonstrating how to use one and calls out to a passing child, Come here, sweetie, and I'll make you look cool!

The girl laughs, agrees, and her hair is fluffed up, billowing. *Sliczna!* she cries. I'm beautiful. Ken translates, laughing.

Farther on, I see a crowd of men huddled together. They are so still that they seem to be listening to music. When we get closer, I see that in fact they are gathered around a table on which there are pigeons in wooden pens, five or six to a cage, maybe a hundred of them. The birds vary in plumage and size, although all have a glint of bluish slate in their coloring. In this glint there is something of the sky above Kraków. The pigeons on the table look like sky samples brought back to earth.

Nobody knows, Ken says, how homing pigeons find their way home. When they are flying in clear weather, they can see thirty kilometres ahead, yet this doesn't explain their unerring sense of direction. During the siege of Paris in 1870, a million messages to the city's inhabitants were delivered by fifty pigeons. It was the first time ever that microphotography was used on that sort of scale. The letters were all reduced, so that hundreds could fit on a tiny film weighing only a gram or two. Then, when the pigeons arrived, the letters were enlarged, copied out, and delivered. Collodion film and carrier pigeons—strange how things come together!

Some birds have been taken out of their cages and are being expertly examined by pigeon fanciers. The birds are lightly pinched between two fingers, the length of their legs is measured, the flat tops of their heads lightly pressed by a

thumb, their flight feathers extended, and all the while they are being held tightly against the men's chests, like trophies.

Ken takes my arm. It's hard, don't you think, to imagine sending news of a total catastrophe by carrier pigeon? The message could announce a defeat, or it could be an appeal for help, but in that gesture of throwing the pigeon up into the sky, so that it heads for home, there is inevitably a hope, isn't there? Sailors from ancient Egypt used to release pigeons from their boats on the high seas to announce to their families that they were on their way home.

I wonder how the chess game is going, I say. The two of us stroll to the other end of the market.

There are sixteen pieces left on the board. Zedrek has king, bishop, and five pawns. He is looking up at the sky, as if seeking inspiration.

Abram looks at his watch. Twenty-three minutes! he announces.

Chess is not a game you can hurry, a customer comments.

He has one good move, whispers Ken, and I bet he's not going to see it.

Move the bishop to C5, is that it?

No, you idiot, his king to F1.

Tell him, then.

Dead men don't move pieces!

Hearing him say these words, I suffer his death. He, meanwhile, takes his head in his hands, and with them he turns the head left and right, as if it were a searchlight. He waits for me to laugh, as I often did at this clown act of his. He doesn't see my anguish. I do laugh, and I suffer his death. For the first time.

When I came out of the Army at the end of the war, he had disappeared. I wrote to him at the last address I had, and there was no reply. A year later, he sent a postcard to my parents—the postcard came from somewhere improbable, like Iceland or Jersey—asking whether we might all spend Christmas together, which we did. He came with a woman, a war photographer who was, I think, Czech. We played Christmas games, we laughed a lot, he teased my mother about buying all the food on the black market.

Between the two of us there was the same complicity. Neither of us looked away or took the slightest step back. We felt the same love: simply the circum-

stances had changed. The *passeur* had delivered his charge; the frontiers were crossed.

The years passed. The last time I saw him, we drove all night with a friend of mine, from London to Geneva. In a forest near Châtillon-sur-Seine, we heard Coltrane playing "My Favorite Things" on the radio. It was during this journey that Ken told me he was returning to New Zealand. He was then sixty-five. I didn't ask him why, because I didn't want to hear him say: To die.

Instead, I made believe that he would come back to Europe. To which he replied, The best thing there, John, down under, is the grass! There's no grass as green anywhere else in the world. He said this forty years ago. I never knew exactly when or how he died.

In the Plac Nowy, among the stolen hair dryers, the honey cake with candied orange peel, Jagusia with her basket now almost empty, the black cherries that have to be sold and eaten quickly because they won't last, the barrel of salted herring, the voice of Ewa Demarczyk on a CD, singing one of her defiant songs, I suffer his death for the first time.

I do not even glance back at where Ken is standing, for he will not be there. Something pulls me back to the pigeons. I walk alone, past the barber's and the soup kitchen and the women sitting on their stools.

When I arrive, a man turns toward me and, as if guessing my distress—is there another country in the world more habitually accustomed to coming to terms with that emotion?—he hands me, without smiling, the carrier pigeon he is holding.

Its feathers feel slightly damp—like satin. The small ones on its breast have a parting in the middle, as on an owl. It radiates heat yet its feathers are cool. It weighs nothing for its size. If I tilt it in the sunlight, its dun-corn color changes for a second into a bluish silver. I hold it against my chest.

I left the Plac Nowy, and found, after asking two passersby, the bank machine. From there I returned to the pension in Miodowa Street and lay down on the bed. It was very hot, hot with the uncertain heat of the eastern plains. Now I could weep. I shut my eyes and imagined shuffling a pack of cards. ♦

THE SPECKS IN THE SKY

BY BEN RICE

One morning, two hundred and twenty-five days after my father left home, specks appeared in the huge blue sky over our house. They were tiny and red at first, like pinpricks of blood. Then the specks grew larger, shivered, turned pink, and spread out like firecrackers. They moved farther apart and then appeared to stop and double back on themselves, as if they had changed their minds about something important.

We stood waiting—Mom, Aileen, and I, staring at the sky and shielding our eyes from the sun.

"Parachutes," I said.

"Impossible, darling," my mother said. "We're on no flight paths."

But a few moments later she saw that I was right.

"Jesus! They are, too," she said. "Look, Aileen! Parachutes!"

"What the hell are parachutes doing way out here?" asked Aileen.

The parachutes were getting bigger all the time. Already, we could see that the leader was wearing a red jumpsuit, black knee-high boots, and a white crash helmet. Another thirty seconds, and I could make out his mustache.

"Look at him go!" I yelled.

He made a beautiful long sweeping arch out over the chicken coops, boomeranged in over the roof of the house, lifting his feet to avoid kicking the TV antenna, and came down heavily, perhaps more heavily than he had expected, in our front yard. He went running along past the gaps in the camel-shed wall, his feet sending up clouds of dust, swerved to avoid the bird Jacuzzi, slalomed between the life-size wooden replica of Lawrence of Arabia and the dried-up oasis water feature, and then, just when we thought he was about to fall, righted himself. The pink parachute floated down and swallowed him up like a huge tongue.

The three of us looked at each other, uncertain what to do. And then all of us ran into the front yard.

"Ryder, go help him!" shouted my mother, who was a worrier by nature. "Get the parachute off. He's going to suffocate."

I went over and lifted up one side, but, just as I was about to duck underneath, the parachutist came out from under the other side, carrying his helmet under his arm.

He was tall, with black hair parted on the left, and he had broad shoulders and eyes the color of the sky.

"Afternoon, young Missy," the parachutist said, saluting me and clicking his heels together. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Commander Kyle Cheshire."

"Cool," I said, staring this huge man up and down. "I'm Ryder Jarvis and I'm a girl." My mother had instructed me to say "I'm a girl" when I met new people, owing to the fact that they tended to mistake me for a boy. I have short hair, you see, and a good scowl, and I throw rocks extremely hard and far and from the elbow.

We shook hands.

"I can see you're surprised to see me, little one," the parachutist said. "But, if it's any consolation, I sure am surprised to see you, too."

I felt a cold shadow cross my face and a breeze run through my hair. Our chickens began squawking in their coops and our camels were braying. Nellie, our dog, ran around the yard barking and jumping up and down.

"Watch out, little lady!" the Commander shouted. "Here comes Bud!"

I ducked and put my hands over my head. The next thing I knew, there was a thud behind me. I turned around, and a second parachutist emerged from underneath his chute.

"Bud! Good landing! Nicely taken, pal. Nice toggle control."

"Thanks, Commander," shouted Bud, who was also a tall, good-looking man with a jaw like a shovel. "I thought I was bird feed for a moment up there."

Bud was younger and slightly skinnier than the Commander, and his ears were a little sticky-outy. He looked up to

the sky. "Looks like everyone got out in time, Commander," he said.

"Got out of where?" my mother called.

The Commander walked over and introduced himself with a low bow. "Delighted to meet you, Ma'am," he said. "You must be the proprietor of this remote homestead. May I just say it's a real pleasure to have landed on the property of so handsome a woman."

My mother's mouth dropped open about as wide as a parachute.

"And these must be your precious daughters," the Commander said, bowing even lower to my sister Aileen. "My oh my! We seem to have touched down on an island of goddesses. Isn't that right, Bud?"

Bud wasn't listening, though. He was staring at the sky. "Boy," he said, "I sure hope Chip made it."

"Relax, Bud," the Commander said. "Chip is a good man, the best on the team. If Chip Gainsborough didn't make it, nobody did."

And everybody did seem to be making it. There were more thuds and grunts, and more pink parachutes in all corners of our yard. The parachutists wore identical red jumpsuits with white helmets, and they all carried pistols in their holsters.

I darted about, introducing myself and giving the parachutists high fives. They were saying things like "Phew!" and "Son of a gun!" and "That was a mighty close shave!" One of them said, "Man, oh, man. The baby just totally blew up. Next thing I know, I'm in free fall." Another said, "God bless America!"

Meanwhile, Bud was rushing around asking about Chip. "Anyone see him on the descent?" he said.

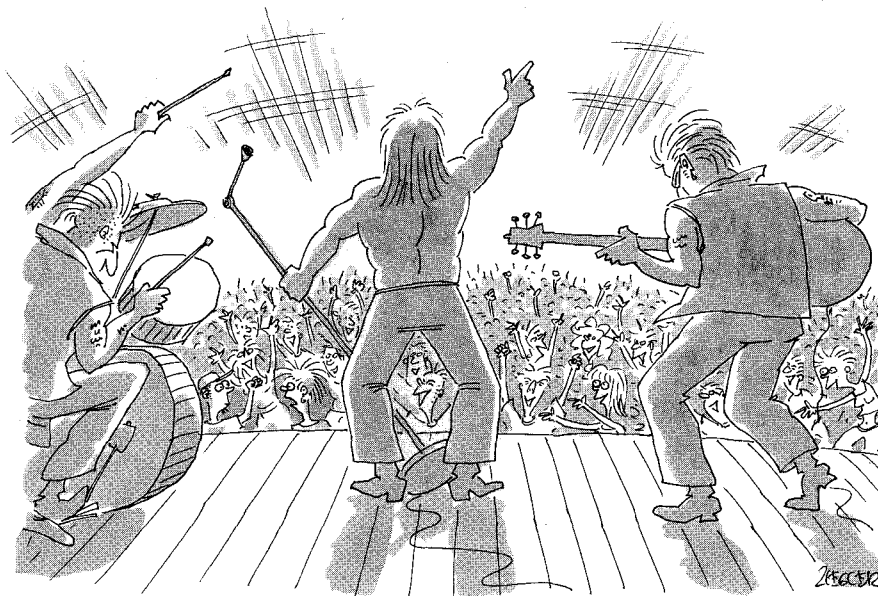
"Not since the cockpit."

"Gee whiz! No Chip, then?"

Aileen came over and put her hand on my shoulder and together we watched Bud. "Anyone hook up with Chip on the way down?" he kept asking.

"Poor thing," Aileen said. "He's so anxious about his friend."





"Iggy Pop? More like Iggy Grandpop."

The moment she spoke, the parachutists stopped what they were doing, realizing they were in the presence of a real beauty, with long dark hair and breasts and everything.

One of them walked over, took hold of Aileen's hand, and got down on one knee. "Pretty lady," he said, "if I were still single, I'd make my chute into a wigwam of love and woo you into it with a poem."

Aileen, who had never had this kind of attention from such a handsome man before, didn't know where to look.

"That's my sister Aileen," I piped up, coming to her rescue. "She's nearly sixteen. And my name's Ryder, and I'm also, just for the record, a girl."

"You're a cool kid, Ryder," one of them said. "I dig the tomboy thing you got going there!"

"Thanks," I said. "But, actually, it's kinda temporary. When I grow up, I'm gonna grow my hair long and have massive breasts and boyfriends and everything."

They all laughed, and then the Commander shouted, "O.K., men. Fall in, everyone!"

The parachutists shouted, "Yes, sir!" Those who were still attached to their parachutes unhitched themselves, and fourteen parachutists assembled in two rows just in front of our house, standing with their arms flat against their sides in a sort of triangular formation. They looked like a set of bowling pins.

The Commander scrutinized his men, coughed, said, "At ease, fellas," and took a notepad and a silver-capped pen from the top pocket of his jumpsuit.

"Bud?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Hank?"

"Here!"

"Bill?"

"You got it!"

"Bob?"

"Yup!"

"Jay?"

"Present and correct!"

"Jake?"

"By the skin o' my teeth!"

"Mike?"

"Wouldn't have missed it for the world!"

"Chip?"

Silence. The Commander looked up and down the rows of his men.

"Chip? Chip Gainsborough?"

Another silence.

"Chip not down?"

"Oh, my God," I heard Bud whisper. "I had a terrible feeling Chip wasn't going to make it."

"No Chip Gainsborough, then?" the Commander said solemnly, tapping his pen on his front teeth. "Shoot! That's not good." He sighed and reluctantly drew a cross on his notepad.

"Maybe he just got swept off course," I called out.

The fifteen parachutists turned in unison.

"Sh-h-h! Ryder," my mom said. "Don't interrupt."

"That's a real nice sentiment, young lady," the Commander called over. "But unfortunately it's impossible. In a Force 10, sure, my men can miss the zone, but in this case, no. We do not tolerate that degree of inaccuracy in this outfit. I'm afraid the truth is that Chip's chute must have failed to open. Very possibly, the rip on his backup jammed, too."

The air suddenly felt tense.

"Yes, the truth is that Chip has raspberry-pancaked," said the Commander solemnly.

"I beg your pardon?" said my mother. "What do you mean, raspberry pan—" Then she realized what it meant.

Bud raised his face to the sky. "Chip! Chip!" he hollered. "Don't do this to me, man!" He collapsed on his knees on the hot earth. I looked up at the sky again—just in case.

But the sky was empty. There were no more specks.

For the next fifteen minutes or so, Mom, Aileen, and I stood watching as the parachutists went around hugging each other and trying to cheer up Bud. They slapped him on the back, saying "Hang in there, Bud!" and "We're with you, man!" and "Courage, big fella!"

Bud said that he and Chip had grown up together. "He was like a brother to me," he said, on the verge of tears. "Like a big brother. We used to share everything, man. We collected soda cans for the deposit and bought our first basketball together."

Eventually, the dashing Commander came over and clapped Bud on the shoulder. "Bud," he said, "you can be proud of Chip. The best ones die young, we all know that. But the cruel truth is that someday, Bud, we will all take a jump and our chutes won't open. One day, all of us will find that our rip cords have jammed and that there is nothing before us but a terrifying plummet onto hard, unforgiving ground."

My mom came forward, and the men politely made way for her. They took off their helmets and arranged them on the ground, where they sparkled in the sun like a batch of giant eggs.

"I don't mean to interrupt you, men,"

she said. "It's a terrible thing that's happened to your colleague, don't get me wrong, a really soul-destroying thing. But I am the owner of this property and I have my responsibilities. So would one of you gentlemen now care to give me some sort of an explanation?"

The men looked at each other, bemused.

"Forgive me," the Commander said. "I'm not sure I follow."

"Well, Commander," my mother said, a little impatiently, "follow this: It's nine in the morning and you come parachuting right in here without a word about what you're doing. But you must know as well as I do that planes never fly over these parts. Never. I mean, take a look around you. Does this look like a place used to receiving visitors?"

The parachutists turned and looked at our rickety old weatherboard house with the patched-up windows and the lopsided sign saying "Jarvis Camel Safaris." They looked at Lawrence of Arabia and our two camels, who were lying down under the sparse shade of the Elephant tree. They cast their eyes over the cramped cacti standing with their hands on their hips like old men complaining about the weather, and saw all my father's junk, which was scattered about the place: his ant factory, the rusty camel-riding simulator, the gecko maze, and the chewing-gum sculpture. They could see how arid everything was and how dilapidated and miserable and run-down. They turned around and surveyed the nothingness beyond our rotting fence: the long dirt roads, the wide-open plains, and the huge, butt-naked sky.

"Well, I hear what you're saying, Ma'am," the Commander said, cupping her hand in his as though it were a hamster. "The situation is this: Following the activation of the emergency signal in our craft, and following the arrival of insurmountable circumstances, we were compelled to activate our emergency procedure and eject at twenty-five thousand feet. We then began falling through freezing temperatures at a hundred and ten miles per hour in a gravity-induced plummet."

"Go on," my mother said.

"Having spotted your isolated dwelling during free fall, I designated your yard as a potential drop zone, and thus steered a course toward it. After relaying my

intentions to the team, we gained our emergency objective. Now, however," the Commander continued, and his voice cracked and wobbled. "Now, however, Ma'am, we have arrived on your property only to discover we are one man short. And not just one ordinary man, either. One important man. One American. One Chip."

I made a clicking noise with my tongue. My mother was staring at her feet as though they were two rabbits she had run over on the road.

"I'm sorry, Commander," my mother said. "It must be awful for you having lost one of your men, just awful. But who are you? Army? Navy? Special Forces? Some kind of fairground display team? You haven't even said. You've simply appeared out of nowhere."

"I'm afraid, Ma'am," the Commander said, "we are not at liberty to divulge this information at present."

"Not at liberty?"

"No, Ma'am. That is, it's classified. Only one other person knows the precise nature of the very important mission we embarked upon, and that is the man whose orders we were following. The great man who commissioned our noble project."

"You mean the President himself?"

"Once more, Ma'am, I am afraid that information is classified. But I can reassure you that we will be acting lawfully under the terms and conditions outlined in Section 15 of the Parachuting Hand-

book, 'Landing Upon Civilian Property,' Clause No. 33B, where it states explicitly that we are to assist the said civilians in any way we can during our stay on the civilian premises."

"You mean you're staying here?"

The Commander smiled and said that, yes, with my mother's permission, he and his men would be staying with us until they had studied their maps, relocated the body of their colleague Chip Gainsborough, and considered it safe to relaunch their mission. "And, therefore, in the meantime," he said stroking his sleek mustache, "I wonder if, having already stunned us with your beauty, you would now be kind enough to quench the thirst of fifteen bereaved but ultimately optimistic parachutists."

Once inside the kitchen, the parachutists sat, some on chairs, some on the floor, whispering among themselves, and pointing at things as though they were inside a church.

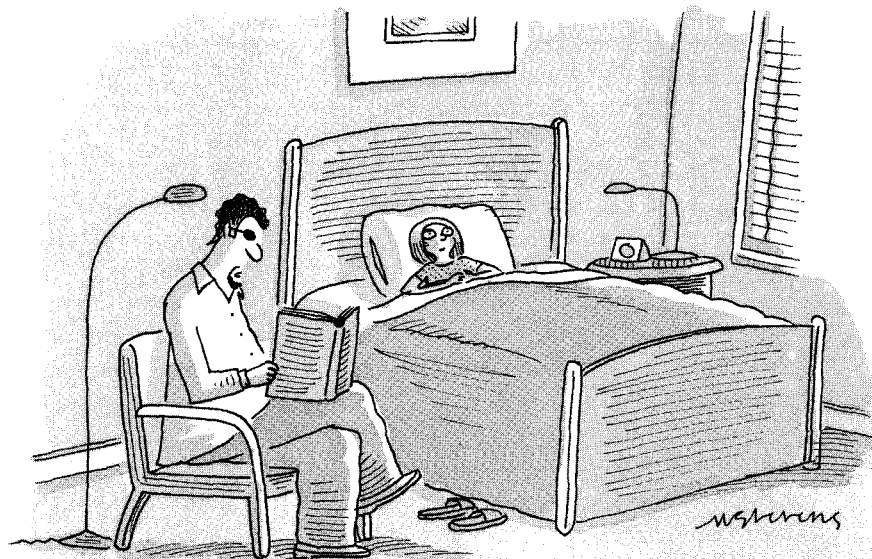
"Wow!" one said.

"Spectacular!" said another.

"I adore your lazy Susan," said another. "My mother had one just like it."

I went out back to fetch a case of beer, and Aileen got down as many glasses and mugs as she could find in our cupboards. There were only fourteen, and so she poured one can into a bowl.

"This is a mighty fine place you have here, Ma'am, if you don't mind me say-



"We are in the bears' house. Goldilocks has just eaten a bowl of porridge. Papa Bear enters."

ing," one of the parachutists said. It may have been the one called Lyle.

"Thank you, young man," my mom said. "But I am afraid it's not true. We have lived in chaos ever since our business folded."

"No, no," Lyle continued. "Honestly, Ma'am. It makes me wish we had to bail out of our plane every day!"

My mother laughed nervously, and the laughter spread right around the kitchen in a circle, and before long all of the parachutists were laughing—apart from Bud. When the enormous laugh had finished, Bud stood up, raised his beer, and said solemnly, "To Chip! My long-lost buddy. May he rest in peace."

"We will look for Chip's body in due course," the Commander announced. "And I assure you that, once found, he will be given a parachutist's burial, with full ceremonial honors."

Then he stood up on a chair and said, "Gentlemen, your orders for this morning are as follows: you will help this fine woman and her wonderful daughters with the housework and any chores that might need doing about the place."

"Oh, that won't be necessary, Commander," said my mom. "Really. I have two perfectly capable girls here."

"Madam," the Commander said, holding up his palms, "sit back and relax. Our superior saw to it that my men were trained in domestic affairs. Please do not stand in their way."

And, with that, the parachutist named Luke rolled up his sleeves and began clearing the glasses. He stacked them in two columns, as if he'd been waiting tables his whole life, and carried them to the kitchen sink while another man, Rob, I believe, stood by his side, his dishrag poised, like a ball player with a mitt.

"Please, don't, gentlemen," my mother said, unable to suppress a smile. "This kind of thing is woman's work."

"Ma'am, with all respect, this is the twenty-first century," the Commander said. "Our superior is nothing if not a modern man and a staunch feminist. It is what he expects of us."

"Madam, could you direct me to a vacuum cleaner?" called out a man who looked a little like Tom Cruise and who I'm pretty sure was named Mart.

"No, honestly," said my mother, clutch-

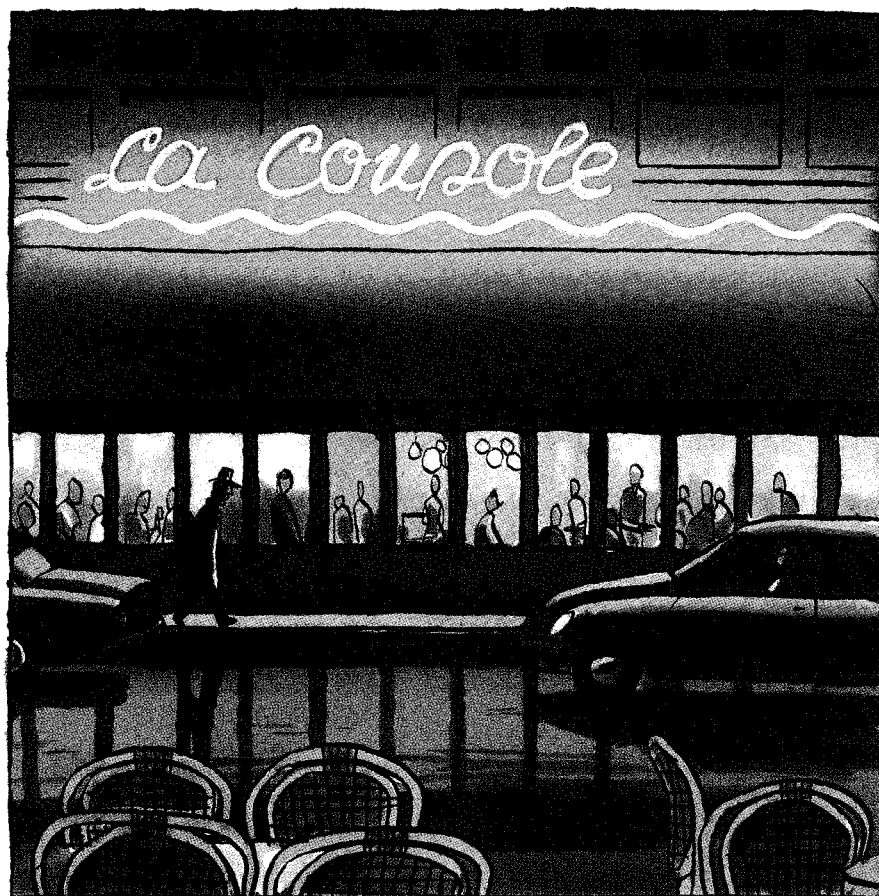
MEMORY BY MAVIS GALLANT

PARIS DIARY (1992)

Sunday, January 5th. On tonight's TV: Three tragic brothers, middle-aged, released from solitary confinement in Moroccan jails, arrive in Paris. Their cells were so cramped, the ceilings so low, that after eighteen years two of them are bent and shrunk, in wheelchairs. The third—a shell of a man now, but still upright—is tenderly cared for by his beautiful twenty-four-year-old daughter. She is a triumphant image of love and happiness. They share the traditional Epiphany *galette*, and she places the gold cardboard crown on his head, making him one of the Three Kings from the East. He pushes back locks of dark hair the wind has blown across her face, quite clearly accepting the day as a miracle.

I think, She is lucky, she has found him again, and I imagine my father returned

to me suddenly and how impossible it is, even as imagining, and I break down. Oh, not because of self-pity, but a rush of feeling from a deep pool of grief. I stand in the kitchen and drink cold water, to stop the tears, and say, How deep is it? Is it an automatic reaction, set off by the sight of that other reunion? I can't measure the difference, but I understand the wound is profound and has been covered over but never healed. I see myself at thirteen, wearing my school uniform, the pleated serge tunic, the running shoes and long black stockings, my heart lurching as I hear, "Don't you know he is dead?" No. I believed what I'd been told when I was ten—that he was in England and would send for me. But I had changed schools and places, and I was afraid he would



never find me. He never returned. Years later, I read something Isaac Babel's daughter wrote in a preface, something like "Every time a car stopped in front of the door, I expected to see my father step out of it." But, of course, he never did.

Saturday, January 11th. Josée de Chambrun is dead. Only a handful of people in France remember even her name. Her father was Pierre Laval, who ran the Vichy government from 1942, and was tried for treason after the war. I can't call Catherine and ask if she noticed the obituary: she has been dead for more than a year. An afternoon, my first winter in Paris, forty-two years ago: Catherine and I in a small crowded gallery. Then Josée de Chambrun came in looking like a thin Latin bourgeoisie, wearing a hat dipped over one eye, with a short veil. Her best look from the thirties, I suppose. With her, a younger woman about my age, late twenties, long legs, long chestnut hair, a bit shy, a bit gauche, seems ill at ease. She turns out to be the exiled Queen of Yugoslavia.

Josée de Chambrun's dark eyes are full of defiance, like her father's when he was sentenced to be shot. While waiting for his execution, he tried to kill himself. He failed, and was shot with his hands tied. He could barely stand and had just enough time to say, "*Vive la France!*" But which France? He must have meant it for anyone within earshot, the priest, the firing squad, perhaps some who weren't there—for that matter, even Pétain. Supposedly, Laval was the one who wrote "*les enfants aussi*" on a document concerning the deportation of Jewish families. There was a question about children, about their being left behind. At his trial, he said he thought he was doing a kindness by keeping families together.

Catherine thought Josée de Chambrun was clever and elegant. Well, she wasn't stupid, which made her unlike most women on the French

far right. But she was just as limited, and she had influence, and the two together, the power and the unreasoned convictions, made her dangerous. After the war, a small crowd treated her as if she were visiting royalty. For the rest, the French stood back neutrally or her very name made them sick. Well, she lived a long time. She had the tough health of her peasant ancestors, but none of their common sense.

Saturday, February 8th. Dinner at La Coupole with Wanda Ladniewska, engraver and sculptor, a Montparnasse friend. The place is packed, the noise beyond sense or reason, but everyone looks cheerful. Wanda won't go anywhere else for dinner. She smokes straight through her meal, juggles fork, knife, and cigarette, sometimes fork in one hand and cigarette in the other. Smoke drifts over the plates of other diners. No one seems to mind. She struggles out of her jacket, reveals a short-sleeved blouse and, on her left arm, the peacock-blue tattooed number. I wonder if she does this because of the table of Germans almost touching ours. She has already said, "They are going to order two desserts each," quite casually, as if remarking on the customs of some little-known community.

Thursday, June 18th. That mortally shy man who works in some sort of international agency, who once invited me to dinner Chez Josephine, with a writer friend, also shy, says, "How are you?" behind me, as I cross Rue de Sèvres. I am carrying *Le Monde* and a large box of salmon mousse. We arrive at the other side of the street and, as always, he can think of nothing else to say. Walk side by side, in silence, until I suddenly dive into the post office. I'm sure to the relief of both of us. I can no more find my way into a conversation with him than with a tree. It must be the same for him. Have nothing to do in the P.O., so I sit down at

a scarred, ink-stained table and read the book reviews in *Le Monde*. A couple of lycée students doing their homework obligingly remove their books so I can put the box of mousse down. An elderly man examines some stamps he has just bought. A peaceful scene. The thought occurs that the shy one might have misunderstood my "Goodbye"—it wasn't definite-sounding—and is waiting outside in the street. Or perhaps came in and was baffled to find me reading the afternoon paper. Hurry out, but there is no sign of him. It has been like that for some twenty years. The only solution would be for one of us to move out of the neighborhood. But what if we both moved and found that we were again neighbors—say, near the Marché aux Oiseaux, and kept meeting there by accident, every Sunday, each of us trying to buy a canary.

Friday, June 26th. Run into my old friend Jane K. at the greengrocer's, smaller than ever, her skin somehow poreless, like parchment. In each ear is a large yellowish hearing aid, all coiled, like a miniature brain. She wears braces on her legs, and large floppy black shoes, like shoes from the Middle Ages. She lets me carry just one of her parcels, and only because she needs a hand for her walking stick. Everything is running out, running down, except her pride and independence and sense of justice. We stop under the awning at the corner of Rue Saint-Placide, so she can rest. I tell her that the last time I stood under this awning with a friend there was a driving rainstorm and we had been caught without an umbrella. My friend suddenly had started to tell me that her husband had a mistress and was living with her, but that hardly anyone in Paris knew. Their only link now was that he brought his clothes home to be washed.

Jane says, "Are there really women who tell such things?" She was born in 1903, the same year as Marguerite Yourcenar. ♦

ing her forehead. "Please, don't, gentlemen. You'll put me to shame."

Just then, one of the parachutists, whose name was Greg, stepped forward. "Ahem," he said. "Excuse me, Ma'am, but would you mind me asking if there is a man currently living in the house?"

My mother's eyebrow twitched like a lizard's tail.

"Only, we could heartily do with some tools, Ma'am," Greg said. "That's not to say, Ma'am, of course, that a woman would not necessarily be in charge of the tools, but often it works the other way around, and so I was just wondering if there might at present be a man in the house who might direct me toward some tools."

There was a terrible silence. I looked at Aileen. Aileen bit her lip and looked at the floor.

"No," my mom said. "There is no man. That is to say, there was once, but not anymore."

The Commander nodded and looked grave.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Ma'am. My colleague Greg here was not meaning to pry. Life, as I have said with regard to Chip Gainsborough, is darn short. One minute we are here. The next minute we are six feet under, our bodies fast food for the worms. But we have pride, Ma'am. We have pride in our dying, just the same. And I'm sure when your husband died—"

"My husband didn't *die*!" my mom said, sounding louder than she had intended. "He *left*! O.K.? He just left!"

There was a collective sigh of empathy from the parachutists, followed by a chorus of "Typical, typical." I thought for a minute that my mom was going to cry.

"There are tools out in the shed, Commander Cheshire," I said. "They're brand-new. Mom bought them for my dad's birthday, but he never got around to using them."

"Perfect, young Ryder," the Commander said. "Well, if you would escort me to your car, Ma'am, I will give it a tune-up. Or did your husband take the car when he went?"

"Yes, he did," said my mother, who had regained some of her composure. "But the pickup is still here in the garage and could heartily do with some attention."

"Show me to it," the Commander

said. "And show us your scorched flower beds and one of the boys will see them restored to perfection. We have a qualified landscape *jardinier* on the team."

Within seconds, the fifteen parachutists clicked into action. One man was under the pickup, another up a stepladder repairing the hole in the living-room ceiling. A few more began helping my mother heave Lawrence of Arabia and the bird Jacuzzi and the rest of my dad's junk into a pile at the side of the yard. Meanwhile, two men announced their intention to conduct a "systematic shopping excursion."

"But the nearest store is five miles away," my mother said. "And you can't go like that. People around here are not used to seeing men in red jumpsuits. Word will get out, and before you know it—"

"Excellent point," the Commander said. "You have an instinct for management. A natural gift. We can't possibly have anyone knowing that we are here. We must conduct ourselves with the maximum discretion at all times."

It was decided that my mother would provide the men with my dad's old clothes. She had hung on to them, saying that one day they might come in handy, if we ever had men of our own. Not, she said, that she'd recommend it.

The clothes were musty and smelled of cigarettes and beer and my dad's overpowering body odor—he had taken to using deodorant and soap only on special occasions. Anyway, we got them for the men, and then Mom, Aileen, and I left the room while the parachutists changed.

While we were waiting, Mom whispered, "I can't believe this is happening."

"It's pretty unreal," said Aileen.

"I reckon there's something weird going on," I said. "They must be escaped criminals. Or aliens or something."

"You watch too many movies, Ryder," my mother said. "These men are clearly

an important team of professionals who have simply run into troublesome circumstances and are making the best of a bad situation. They're most likely government intelligence agents, and it is our duty as fellow American citizens to accommodate them."

"I feel really sorry for poor Chip," Aileen said. "His body could be anywhere. And his friend Bud, poor thing, is almost desperate with grief."

"Yes, it's sad," my mother said. "But, then again, these are not the kind of men to crack when the going gets rough. These are the tough-cookie type, the kind who take the hard knocks and get on with their lives."

The door opened and the men filed out into the yard carrying their jumpsuits. On each parachutist, I noticed a piece of my dad's old clothing. His fluorescent belt. His green sweatshirt with the elbow holes. His pair of flared work pants. His "KISS A CAMEL AND TASTE THE DIFFERENCE" baseball cap. His yellow windbreaker. The T-shirt with the Africa-shaped coffee stain and the bits of dried egg down the front.

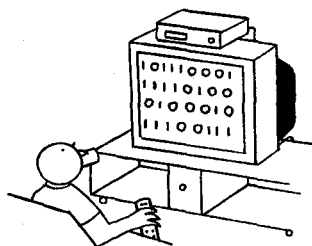
"Oh, my Lord!" my mother said, clasping her hand to her mouth. "Have you ever seen anything like it?"

"Are they wearing Dad's underwear, too?" I asked, suddenly embarrassed. I was referring to the baggy white mesh Y-fronts he used to wear under his bathrobe and loaf around in on Saturday mornings, watching superhero cartoons. They were so big, those underpants, that you could have stretched out a single pair between two trees and made a hammock.

"Look!" said Aileen, who was standing with her nose pressed against the window.

On the washing line, there were now fifteen red jumpsuits moving around in the breeze, like a headless pop band. And on the ground the pink parachutes were spread out in the sun to air. I don't think our camels had seen anything so impressive since Dad drove his solar-powered motorscooter through the wall of their shed.

I found the parachutist called Greg near the washing machine. "Don't worry, young Miss," he said, nodding at the bras, stockings, and panties he had collected in his arms. "I've seen it all before. I'm married myself, with three



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teen-age daughters. There's not a negligee in North America that would bring the color to my cheeks!"

"So where do your wife and kids live?" I asked him.

"What was that, Miss?"

"You mentioned you had kids," I said. "And I was wondering where they live."

"That's a good question," he answered.

"I know," I said.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I'm from a picturesque little town not far from Oklahoma City," he said.

"Oh, yeah?" I asked. "What town's that?"

"What town, little Missy?"

"Yeah, what town?"

"Er . . . St-Stewartsville," he said, coughing into his hand, and then he returned to the laundry.

I ran upstairs to the room we call the library, which is more or less a couch, a TV, and a few shelves of books, and took down the big leather-bound world atlas. My suspicions were correct. Greg the parachuting laundryman had been lying. There was no Stewartsville, Oklahoma. Stewartsville didn't exist. "Weird," I thought, but I decided to keep this to myself for a while, until I had made some further observations.

Out in the yard, the parachutist called Mike had set up a makeshift workbench and was sawing pieces of wood and then hammering them together.

"What is it?" I asked him. "What are you making?"

"Take a guess, kid," he said.

"Is it a canoe?"

"Good idea," he said. "It could be, couldn't it?"

Mike began whooping and hollering and paddling like a maniac, and for ten minutes we chased each other all over.

"For a parachutist, you shoot a pretty mean arrow," I said.

"Years of practice," he replied. "Your pop never played cowboys and Native Americans with you, kid?"

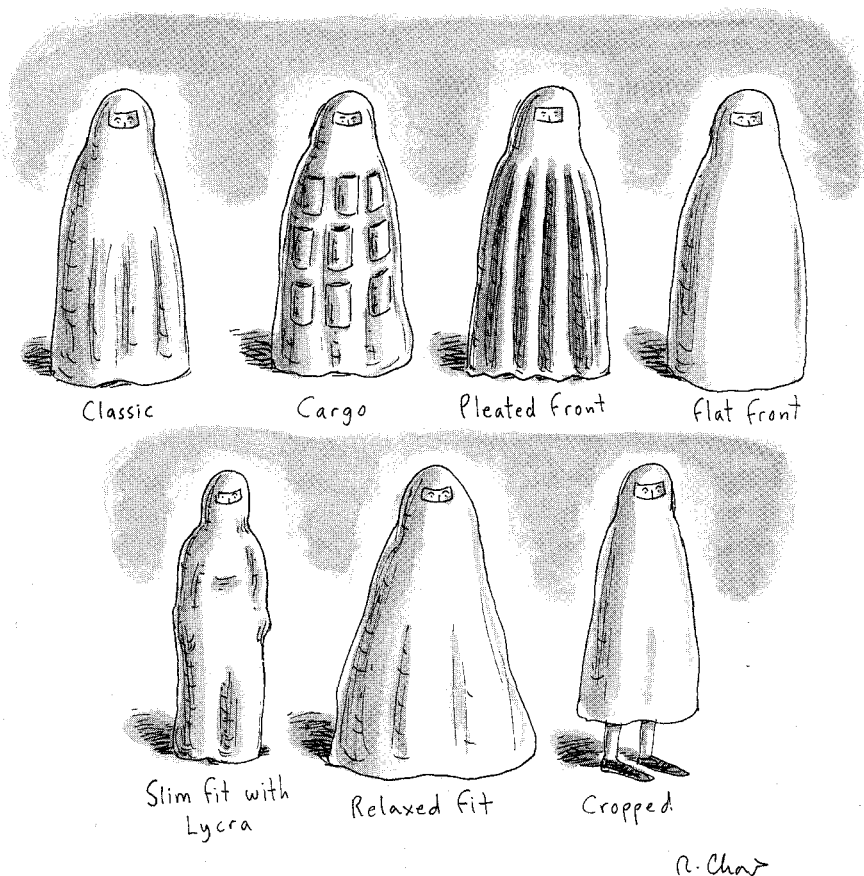
"Sometimes," I said. "But not so much. He was usually quite busy with his projects."

Mike looked over at the pile of Dad's contraptions. "So what was the point of all those projects?"

"I am afraid I am not at liberty to reveal this information at present," I said, and walked away, feeling pretty smart.

On the other side of the yard, the

AFGHANIGAP



parachutist called Bob was giving our camels a health check.

"Don't worry, Miss," Bob said as he inspected their teeth. "I'm a trained veterinarian. We'll have your cameli dromedarii better in no time."

He shined a torch in their eyes. He looked up their hairy asses. He patted their straggly fawn humps and examined their pairs of toes. And all the time he was saying, "Hmm, looks like a case of serious neglect."

"My dad didn't neglect them," I protested. "He loved them, he really did. But it's expensive keeping camels, and when they got scabies and the first one died, he . . . Look, he loved those camels more than anything."

"Yeah, well," Bob said, "I guess not enough to stay and look after the survivors, huh?"

I couldn't think of a reply this time, and I still hadn't thought of one when Hank and Mart came back with the shopping.

There were twenty bags altogether,

including food for the camels. And sixteen bunches of flowers.

"All these for me?" gasped my mother.

"Only one bunch, I'm afraid, Ma'am," laughed Hank. "The rest are for Chip. We thought we'd place them with his body when we find him."

"Of course," my mother said. "I'm sorry. How presumptuous of me."

"Ma'am, may I introduce Big Jay, our cook," said Commander Cheshire. "What will you be whipping up for lunch, Jay?"

"Nothing fancy, Commander," said Big Jay, who was looking through the shopping bags. "But, if you give me a moment, I should be able to throw together a salmon-asparagus soufflé and cannelloni stuffed with broccoli paste for starters, followed by a slow pork cutlet on a couch of potatoes importantés, with parsnips and an avocado-thyme-and-lemon sauce. And, for dessert, a prime Sicilian mango sorbet."

"Wait. You're cooking this for us?" my mother said.

"Sure am," said Jay. "It's really not



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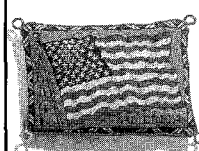
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such a big deal, Ma'am. Remember, we have rehearsed for years for exactly this kind of situation. I am hungry to put everything I have practiced in my training into operation in the field."

The Commander slapped Jay on the back and informed his men that it was time to get washed up for lunch.

In a few minutes, a line formed along the landing outside the bathroom. The fifteen tanned parachutists stood patiently with their towels around their waists. One sat on a stool cutting his toenails, collecting the little hard crescents in the lid of a shaving-cream can, which he emptied out in the wastebasket. Some read books. I noticed that, whereas my dad had always had love handles, and a potbelly that he called his "hump," these parachutists had no extra fat. They had nipples like little raspberries, and their bodies were hairless except for neat patches of crisp arrow-shaped chest hair pointing down to their you-know-whats.

"What you reading, Jake?" somebody asked.

"A book by a writer named Menjabin. Chip lent it to me yesterday."

"He did? What's it about?"

"That's a tricky one," Jake said. "I guess it's a kind of domestic tragicomedy-cum-Surrealist fable. Menjabin takes potshots at gender self-consciousness and hypocrisy in a post-feminist world."

"Good for her!" shouted Lyle.

"No, actually, it's a him," said Jake. "The author's name is Eric. Eric Menjabin."

"Oh, right," said Lyle, "Well, it sounds awesome, anyway."

"Actually, it's not," said Jake. "His grasp of the American idiom is at best shaky. His understanding of feminism blinkered and naïve. The narrative depends upon the same cheap gags endlessly repeated. And, as for his characters"—he took off his tortoiseshell glasses—"well, to put it bluntly, they're, all of them, shallow stereotypes."

"Then again it might just be me," Jake sighed. "After losing Chip, books seem a little futile, don't they?"

"You're right, Jake," the Commander said. "A tragedy like this makes any work of art seem redundant. What can a frivolous story masquerading as a novel of ideas possibly offer us in the face of human loss?"

"I agree, sir," Jake went on, flicking

through the book. "Look at this. Chip has underlined his favorite passages. And you see these doodles? How much more meaningful are Chip's last humble scribbles than any of Eric Menjabin's cynical utterances."

The parachutists crowded in to admire Chip's doodles, and while they were poring over them I tapped Aileen's elbow and we sneaked into the bathroom to wash up without the parachutists noticing.

"My God, these guys are so smart!" Aileen said.

Everything in the bathroom was clean as a whistle. I was wondering what kind of men could possibly be so clean when Aileen let out a scream.

"What is it?" I yelled.

Aileen was staring at the toilet. "Look. Can you believe it?" she screeched.

"What?" I said.

"They put the seat back down!"

My dad had always left the toilet seat up, of course. He left hairs in the tub, too. They were long and squiggly—like the scrawny handwriting in the message he had put on the kitchen table before he left, which said, "Your Mom wants me to go and so I'm leaving."

After we had cleaned up, we went downstairs and waited while the squeaky-clean parachutists, smelling of shaving cream, came down one by one to listen to the local news on the radio. They were relieved to hear no reports of any parachute sightings in the area. This, the Commander told us, meant that the secrecy of their mission was still intact, and that once they had recovered Chip they could pick up right where they had left off.

"Lunch is served, everyone!" Jay called from the kitchen.

We marched in and the parachutists formed an orderly line at the stove. They waited until everyone had filled their plates, and then sat down and took up their knives and forks and the Commander said, "For what we are about to receive, may God, Allah, Buddha, the Hindu Trimurti, or whoever rules our own personal religious world make us truly thankful."

"Amen," the men said.

"And Awomen, too," added the Commander.

There was silence but for the smacking of lips. Unlike my father, who really

loved a good chew, the parachutists ate silently, with their mouths closed. And they didn't slurp their wine. They sipped it, and drew comparisons between the taste and things like freshly mowed grass in the summer, or bonfire smoke, or lavender and honey and driftwood.

"May I say once again, Ma'am, your elder daughter is as pretty as pecan pie," the Commander said between mouthfuls. "And the younger will break hearts when she's grown out of that tomboy phase."

"Thank you, sir," my mom said. "I've done my best to bring them up to be resourceful, sensible girls. But it has been hard with no man in the house to help me with their education."

"You have had great success, nevertheless, Ma'am," the Commander said. "I am only too aware of how tough it can be running a household solo, for my wife left me ten years ago."

My mother and the Commander then exchanged what I can only describe as a deep and meaningful look. I don't know about the Commander, but I know my mother was trying to imagine what kind of woman would be crazy enough to walk out on a man like this. Maybe there was something else on her mind, too. Anyway, for the rest of the meal she remained strangely quiet and glanced up only once or twice from her food.

There was a loud beeping sound and the Commander reached into the pocket of my dad's pants, took out a watch, turned off the alarm, and blew on a silver whistle.

"Gentlemen," he said, "now that you are replenished, it is time to return to serious matters. We must immediately conduct a thorough search for Chip Gainsborough before the birds attempt to gorge themselves upon his body."

The parachutists marched outside, and one of them got behind the wheel of the pickup and seven others clambered up into the back and sat opposite each other on the benches, knee to knee. They loaded on bottles of water, covered themselves in sunscreen, and lifted onto their laps the strange-shaped canoe.

"Hey, why are you taking the canoe, Mike?" I asked.

"It's no canoe, little one," Mike said. "Actually, it's a coffin to put our colleague Chip in once we find him."

I felt stupid for not figuring it out, and a little spooked because I had been playing cowboys and Indians in a coffin without even knowing it.

"Good luck, men," the Commander said. "Keep your eyes peeled at all times."

"Take Nellie with you," Aileen said. "She has a wicked sense of smell."

"Can I go, too?" I asked.

"That's a nice idea, young Miss," the Commander said, "but, in this case, no, you may not."

"How come?" I said.

The Commander squatted down so he was at my level and smiled at me sadly. "Well, pretty Missy," he said, "because the sight of a dead parachutist is too much for a young lady to bear."

"I don't mind," I said.

"I believe you," the Commander said. "But, remember, Chip hit the ground at a great velocity. He may well have become dismembered on impact. His head may have rolled some distance from his neck, and his eyeballs will have definitely become dislodged."

"I think it's best we stay at home, then, Ryder, don't you?" said my mother.

"You will be in good company, ladies," the Commander said. "For seven of us will stay here and help make preparations for the funeral. And we will start by digging a grave for Chip Gainsborough in the yard."

"A grave?" I said.

"In our yard?" said my mother. "But surely Chip's parents will want his body flown home."

"That's a lovely sentiment, Ma'am," the Commander said. "But it's a tradition in our outfit, and a stipulation of our membership under Clause 99B, 'Deaths and Departures,' that, following an accident of this kind, a parachutist must be buried in close proximity to the said site of impact."

"But you can't bury him here," I said. "We don't even know him."

"Don't worry about that, Miss," the Commander said. "I can assure you that Chip would have felt very comfortable in these quiet yet domestic surroundings. He was a country boy himself. And, knowing how proud his parents were of his profession, I feel confident that to be buried here near the said site of impact is exactly what they would have wanted for him."

Then he turned to the men in the

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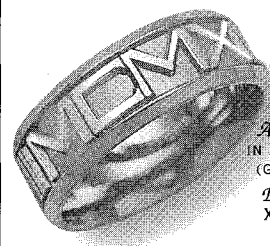


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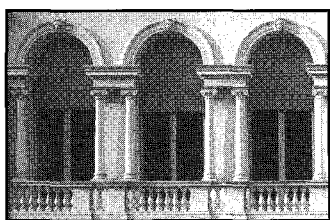
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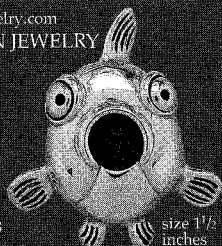
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pickup. "Godspeed, boys! And be as quick as you can, for we have a great deal to prepare before tonight."

"Now," the Commander said, after the pickup had disappeared along the dirt road. "Like the great American poet, we find ourselves in a proverbial yellow wood."

"What?" I said.

"We have two options. Which would you prefer to do: arrange the flowers for Chip's funeral or dig the trench?"

"Are you kidding?" I said.

My mother, Aileen, and I crossed the yard to the shed to fetch the pickaxe and the shovels while the remaining parachutists went inside the house to put together a few funeral bouquets for Chip.

"Right, girls," my mother said. "We must grant the dead privacy. So we'll dig at the bottom of the yard, well away from the house."

I guess it's not every mother who can handle a pickaxe. But mine, underneath her fragile exterior, was tough as boots. The ground was dry and rock-hard, but Mom just clenched her teeth and raised the pickaxe and then hurled it down. And, after a few hard blows, the earth started to give.

"He's cracking!" my mother yelled. "We've got him on the ropes, girls!"

She put down her pick and wiped the sweat from her forehead.

"Nothing like a little womanual labor, huh?" she smiled.

Then we took up our shovels and started digging. We hadn't been working long before Mom and Aileen started rattling on and on about how wonderful the parachutists were. I decided now was a good time to spill the beans about Stewartsville, Oklahoma.

"So what? That doesn't necessarily add up to anything, Ryder," Aileen said. "His home town is probably too small to be covered by our atlas."

"Now, listen here, honey," my mother said. "I know that this is hard to believe, and that in the past I have often said otherwise, but you have to understand that not every man in the world is a liar."

"I'm not saying all men are liars," I said. "I'm just saying I've got a hunch these guys—"

"Well, personally, I trust them," said Aileen.

"Just because you have the hots for

that guy Bud," I said, nudging my sister in the ribs.

"I have not!" protested my sister.

"Now, now, Ryder," my mother said. "Who Aileen has the hots for is her business. And, besides, how often does one come across men to have the hots for way out here?"

"How often do you see parachutists who cook and do the housework and arrange flowers?" I said.

I was shocked when a tear appeared in my mother's eye.

"Poor boojum," she said. "I've scarred you for life. After your father, you'll always have a distorted view of men and never trust a single one of them."

"That's not true," I said.

"It is," sniffed my mother. "If I had only never married him, you would be much more likely to find happiness with a decent one when you grow up."

"If you had never married him, I wouldn't be alive," I said. "End of story."

"Ryder has a point there, Mom," Aileen said.

"Anyway, I haven't got a bad opinion of men," I said. "I liked Dad. He was a bit lazy, granted, and he had some strange ideas. But generally—"

"Now, don't you 'generally' me, Ryder Jarvis," my mother said, taking up her shovel and plunging it into the soil. "He took things much too far, and well you know it."

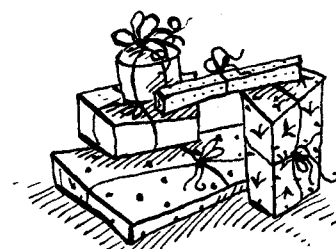
"She's right, Ryder. He did," said Aileen.

"He was a failure, pure and simple," my mother said. "You only have to look at these parachutists to see that. They have everything he lacked. Common sense. Charm. Discipline. Consistency."

"Mom has a point," Aileen said. "Remember Dad's crazy ideas that always backfired? That lizard-racing syndicate, for example, or the whole camel-trekking business?"

"Come on, it wasn't his fault we lost the camels," I said.

"Not directly," my mother said, throw-



ing a shovel's worth of soil over her shoulder. "But dragging us out here in the first place was sheer madness—setting up a tourist attraction in the middle of nowhere with no decent roads and zero sightseeing potential."

"No crazier than digging a trench for someone we don't even know in our own front yard," I said.

For a second, my mother was at a loss for words.

"Well, at least we're being helpful," she said. "Which is more than I could ever say for your father."

"But he's a changed man," I said. "He's learned to cook. And he wants to take you on a romantic cruise in his sailboat off the coast of California. He told me on the phone."

My mother sighed and shook her head. "No, thanks, Ryder," she said. "There's no way in hell I'm going anywhere on a boat that sails against the wind. It's a recipe for disaster, as well as a scientific impossibility."

I was about to explain how the boat worked, using two propellers, the way Dad had shown me out on the creek with a model, but Mom wasn't listening.

"Men never change, Ryder," she said. "Remember that. Now, come on, we should stop wasting time and get on with more practical matters, like digging this here trench for Chip Gainsborough. We don't want the Commander coming out and catching us slacking, do we?"

We finished the trench just before it got dark. Then we went inside, where we discovered that the parachutists had not made a few simple wreaths. Oh, no. They had woven a huge tapestry out of the flowers. In the foreground, the words "CHIP GAINSBOROUGH—REST IN PEACE" were spelled out in chrysanthemums and desert poppies. And if you stared at the word "CHIP" long enough more details began to appear. For example, in the "P" a sky of blue cornflowers emerged dotted with parachutes made from pink roses, and if you closed one eye and stood very close you could just about make out a plane of tulip petals flying through clouds of white gerberas toward a dandelion sun.

"Holy cow!" my mother said. "It's a work of art."

"Nothing so glamorous, I'm afraid," the Commander said. "But I think Chip

would have appreciated it. He had a penchant for trompe-l'oeil and a deep respect for floral pentimento."

He was just explaining what pentimento meant when headlights swept across the walls of the kitchen.

"They're back from the search!" cried Luke.

We rushed to the door. The parachutists jumped from the pickup and, with shouts of "We did it!," turned cartwheels across the moonlit yard.

"We have recovered Chip's body!" Bud shouted. "We found him!"

He ran over to Aileen and threw his arms around her and planted a kiss on her forehead. Mom, meanwhile, was waving at the parachutists as though welcoming them home from war.

The Commander stood proudly on the doorstep, his arms folded across his chest. "Well done, men!" he cried jubilantly. "Never let future generations say that you were not the bedfellows of victory and success." Then he lit a cigar.

The parachutists hugged and playfully punched one another, and Aileen and my mom hugged and punched them, too.

"However," the Commander went on, puffing hard to get the cigar going, "let us not forget the gravity of this occasion. For against our gains we must measure our losses. Tonight, a great star has been extinguished. Chip Gainsborough, gentlemen, is dead."

Everyone was quiet again, and the men unloaded the coffin, grunting under its weight, and, with extreme care, lowered it onto the ground.

"What did Chip look like when you found him?" I asked. "Was he, like, totally deformed?"

"Sh-h-h, Ryder," my mother said. "What kind of a question is that?"

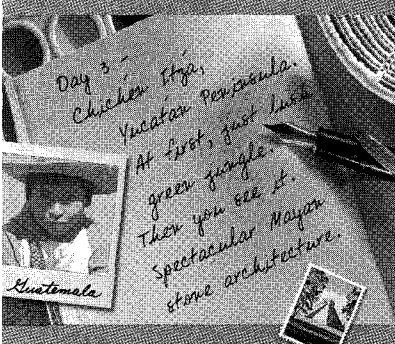
"A perfectly good one, Ma'am," Mike said. "He was kinda like this, Miss." And he lay down on the ground in order to demonstrate the position in which they had discovered Chip. "And amazingly well preserved. The impact of the fall made a crater around him, protecting him from the desert winds."

"Dust clung to his legs," Bud added, "and his parachute lay beside him like a forlorn lover."

"My, how tragic," Aileen said.

"No need to be upset, ladies," the Commander said. "I assure you that it would have all been over very quickly for

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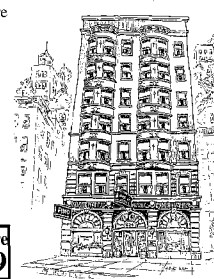
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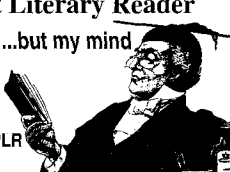
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Chip. Like switching out the lights. There would have been little time for any pain." He paused and licked his lips, as if tasting the gravity of the moment. "Now," he said gravely. "Let the funeral proceedings unfold."

The parachutists laid the magnificent tapestry of flowers down before the coffin and formed themselves in a perfect horseshoe around it. The Commander handed out candles. The flames flickered and swayed in front of their faces.

"May I say, Ma'am, how youthful you seem tonight," the Commander whispered to my mother.

I cringed, but he was right. Mom was not a troubled middle-aged housewife any longer. In the flickering candlelight she looked like a young girl on her first date in a dark movie theatre.

The parachutist called Pete took out a bugle, raised it to his lips, and played "Taps." It was, I don't mind admitting, a very moving moment. The bugle glowed in the moonlight. Our chickens were as

still on their roosts as china vases on a shelf, and even Nellie sat quietly and listened as the music swelled hypnotically in the desert air.

When Pete had finished, the Commander heeled his cigar into the ground and stepped forward. "I would like to give thanks for the great—nay, extraordinary—life of Chip Archibald Gainsborough, who joined us on many missions and achieved an array of excellent—nay, astounding—results. He was sensitive, but not too overly so. He could be wild and passionate, and cool and rational. He was sophisticated and he was primitive, and both idealistic and practical. And now that his supreme life has come to an end, and his body lies supine before us in this simple wooden vessel, I would like to sum it all up by saying, once more, thank you for the life and times of Chip Gainsborough—the complete man."

There were nods of approval and murmurs of "Here, here." Bud added, in a quavering voice, "And he was a mighty

good buddy to me when I was a kid. We used to dive for sand dollars together. I remember one time up in Maine—" But he broke down and began weeping. And so did Mom.

Meanwhile, I, who had never met the great Chip Gainsborough, and who had been more than a little mistrusting of the parachutists, also felt a tear welling up in the corner of my eye. It occurred to me that I might have been too suspicious of these perfect but warmhearted parachutists, who had gone to such lengths to recover the corpse of their colleague and see him properly buried. I looked along the row of sad faces, and resolved to give them the benefit of the doubt and, for the sake of my mother, to cast aside all suspicion. They had, after all, made such an effort to make her happy, and what could possibly be wrong with that? And what did it matter how much she liked the Commander as long as she was still alive?

And then, when all of us were at our most melancholic, we were startled by a terrific swoosh, and the sky was miraculously full of the most magnificent fireworks.

"Wow!" I yelled.

Catherine wheels were whirling on the chicken coops while rockets zipped off skyward, leaving behind a blaze of purple and gold. On the side of the yard, smoke was hissing from a pile of Dad's junk. I thought at first it was fireworks waiting to go off, but a few seconds later the bird Jacuzzi, the chewing-gum sculpture, and poor old Lawrence of Arabia were eaten by flames.

"Hey, wait!" I shouted. "Who said to burn Lawrence and all Dad's stuff?"

"The Commander," Mom said. "And with my blessing. That man's been standing there like a zombie for years, and I'm sick of his useless face."

"Incredible fireworks!" Aileen yelled. "But where did they come from?"

"Guilty once again," the Commander said. "I can't deny it. I set them up secretly when you were digging."

"But they'll scare the camels," I said. "And Nellie hates loud noises."

"It's O.K., Miss. I took the liberty of providing them with earplugs," said Bob, the parachuting vet.

Meanwhile, the other parachutists whipped sparklers from their pockets, lit them using the candles, and tearfully tried to scribble Chip Gainsborough's



name in the air before they fizzled.

"Friends!" the Commander shouted excitedly. "If I know Chip, and I think I do, he will be looking down upon us right now saying, 'Why do they look so sad? Did I live a great and courageous life to be wept over like a broken doll? No! Let there be singing and dancing!'"

"My thoughts exactly, sir!" said Pete, as he came out of the house carrying my father's steel guitar. "Life is too short for sadness."

He began to pluck out a tune, and, with a cry of "This is for you, Chip!", the Commander grabbed hold of Mom's hand and boogie-woogied off around the yard.

"Come on, Miss," Luke shouted. "Don't be sad. It's Chip's favorite song!" He pulled me toward him and spun me around and we went careering past Chip's grave. The other parachutists formed a circle, clapping and making whooping noises. "Yeeehaahh!"

When the song was finally over, the parachutists bowed to us and wiped tears from their eyes and said, "Ma'am, thank you so much" and "Chip would be ever so grateful. He was always one for a dance." I tried to curtsy, but I felt dorky, and so I bowed instead.

Then Bud walked over to the coffin and said, "Night-night, my brother. And may your pink parachute land you safely in Heaven."

Four of the parachutists picked up the coffin, raised it carefully onto their shoulders, and carried it to the trench at the bottom of the yard. Just as they were lowering the coffin down to waist level, however, something unexpected happened.

The parachutist named Will, who was holding the front end of the coffin, lost his grip and let out a yelp of panic as he fumblingly tried to recover it. But he couldn't. The coffin slipped from his hands. There was a hollow sound of splintering wood and the parachutists at the rear, shocked by the sudden lurch forward, found their end yanked from their clutches, too. Before they could break the coffin's fall, there was another pine-shattering crunch. The force of the impact swung the lid of the coffin open, exposing the inside for all to see.

For a few seconds, the parachutists stood in a state of spasm, with their shoulders hunched up to their ears. Their faces were screwed up and their eyes squeezed tight.

Because there was nothing inside. Chip Gainsborough's corpse was not there.

We stood gaping at the empty coffin. My mother opened her mouth to say something but no words came. She turned to the Commander for an explanation, but his hands were clamped over his face as if it were about to crumble into thousands of pieces.

"Commander?" she said.

The Commander let out a long sigh, like the slide of a trombone.

"Commander?" my mother repeated. "What's going on? Why is Chip Gainsborough not in his coffin?"

"I don't know," the Commander whispered hoarsely.

"Only I should hate to think, Commander," my mother continued anxiously, "that we had gone through all that grieving for poor Chip when his body is still lying unfound and alone somewhere out there."

The Commander removed his hands, leaving blotchy finger marks on his forehead. He looked at my mother long and hard and then he slowly seemed to pull himself together.

"Yes, yes, yes. My feelings exactly, Ma'am," he said. And he turned sharply to his men.

"Right, men!" he barked. "You have some explaining to do. Fall in! Fall in immediately! And you better be goddam quick about it!"

The parachutists hastily assembled by the grave in a shaky version of their bowling-pin formation, and glanced sheepishly at one another.

A notch had appeared between the Commander's eyebrows, as if someone had taken a swing at him with a pick. "Well, now, men," he said, pacing up and down in front of his men. "This is some surprise!"

"Yes, sir," the men mumbled.

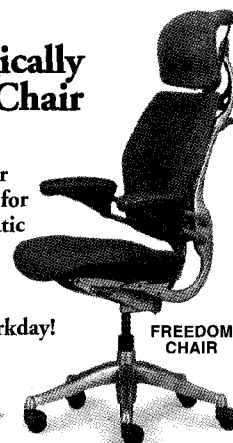
"A very unpleasant one, at that," the Commander went on, and then he started to shout. "Because, as you are well aware, Chip's body is not in the coffin, where it should be!"

The men said nothing.

"So answer me this, gentlemen," the Commander continued, in a calmer tone. "Am I right in thinking that when you came back in triumph bearing Chip Gainsborough's body earlier on you

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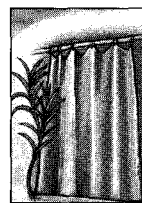
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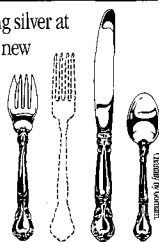
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had not in fact found the body at all?"

The parachutists glanced at each other and nodded reluctantly.

"I see," the Commander said, trying very hard to keep his cool. "Now, I wonder if I might be so bold as to inquire as to which of you is responsible for this. Who is the ringleader?"

No one answered.

"Very well. In that case, I shall count to fifteen. And if the person who is responsible does not come forward, I will assume you are all culpable and punish the whole outfit."

The Commander counted to eight quite slowly. No one came forward.

"Nine." He moved threateningly toward his men. "Ten, eleven."

Bud clenched his teeth. Hank closed his eyes as if in prayer.

"Twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen!"

"It was me, sir!"

The parachutist named Lyle took one brave step forward.

The remaining thirteen parachutists sighed with relief.

"It was all my idea, sir," Lyle said, holding his chin high. "All my fault, sir. And I would just, sir, like to express my sincere apologies, sir, to you, sir, and this family, sir, for what I have done. I accept full responsibility for the deception, sir."

The Commander stared at Lyle and shook his head in disgust. He walked over to the young parachutist and squared up to him, chin to chin. Lyle bit his lip and returned the Commander's stare.

"Well, well, well. Lyle Spackman."

"Yes, sir."

"Who'd have thought it, eh?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, now, Lyle," the Commander drawled. "May I, with your kind permission, be so rude as to ask why you found it necessary to pretend to have found Chip Gainsborough's body?"

Lyle eyed his fellow-parachutists, and then, in a throaty whisper, he said, "Because we thought you might be pretty angry, sir, if we did not find the body, sir, knowing what a perfectionist you are, sir, and knowing, sir, how important it is to you that a job gets finished properly, and that everything always goes perfect and swimmingly, sir."

"Is that right? Well, things aren't going too goddam swimmingly now, are they, Lyle Spackman?"

"No, sir."

"You have made me look like a moron, Lyle. You have made all of us look ridiculous in front of this excellent woman and her family."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, this parachute troop prides itself on what, exactly, Lyle?"

"Perfection, sir!"

"Correct," the Commander said.

"Turn around and put your hands on your head, Lyle Spackman!" he shouted. "Now!"

Lyle did as he was ordered.

"Have you anything you wish to say before you are dismissed?"

"Not really, sir," Lyle said, choking up. "I'd just like to say so long to the fellows. And thank you for being good buddies. And thanks to this family for their hospitality. And I'm really heartily sorry I tried to deceive you, sir."

"Wait a minute, there, Commander," my mother said, stepping forward. "Lordy, there's really no need to go and fire this young man from the outfit. What he did was wrong, sure. But it sounds like he was only trying to please you. He had your best interests at heart."

The Commander put a hand on my mother's shoulder. "Relax, Ma'am," he said. "And have no fear. I assure you that under no circumstances would I dream of doing such a thing."

"But you said something about dismissing him," my mother said. "Didn't you?"

At that moment, the Commander whipped the pistol from his holster and aimed the barrel straight at Lyle's head. We gasped in astonishment as, holding the gun steady, he placed the nub up against the young parachutist's temple.

"Correct, Ma'am, I did," the Commander said.

"No!" Aileen screamed. "Commander! What are you doing?"

"Don't do this, please!" my mother howled. "I beg you! Commander Cheshire! Put that gun away."

"Stand aside, please, Ma'am. And let this man be punished. For this pathetic specimen, this Lyle Spackman, has sought to undermine my authority and make a mockery of our emotions. And it is time to teach him that we do not tolerate fraud in this outfit."

"You're not serious," my mother said. "Tell me this is just some silly parachutist's prank!"

But the Commander wasn't listening. "Where there is imperfection and lack of respect, where there is dishonesty and deceit, we weed it out, Ma'am. We are a team of consummate professionals. We are not failed camel-keepers who drop everything and walk away when a situation becomes difficult."

"Please," Lyle said. "Let the Commander kill me, Ma'am. It is nothing more than I deserve."

"What are you talking about? You don't deserve to die, Lyle!" screeched Aileen. "Bud! Do something!"

But Bud just stood there.

We rushed over to the Commander and tried to pull down his arm.

"I said you couldn't trust them, Mom," I cried. "I told you they weren't what they seemed."

"Shut up, you little transvestite!" the Commander said. "Do you hear? Or I will execute you on the spot!"

I shut up.

"Lyle Spackman," the Commander said, "you have pretended that there was a man in a coffin, and now you will, in the most real sense, take up residency in that coffin yourself."

"I'm ready, sir," Lyle said.

"Please!" screamed my mother. "Don't shoot!"

But it was too late. There was a loud whip-crack and Lyle's brains flew from the side of his head like a ball of spit. His legs gave out from underneath him and a thick brown substance oozed from his head onto the ground, where almost instantly it clotted and congealed. I saw it all from between my fingers, which were covering my face. He buckled and keeled over, twitched, and then lay suddenly still.

The parachutists stared down at Lyle's body. Aileen was bent over, retching. I don't know what Mom was doing. My eyes had misted over, and my left leg was shaking uncontrollably.

After the pistol shot, things seemed to unfold in slow motion. The parachutists'

voices were warped and tinny in my ears.

"Well? Is he dead?" I heard the Commander say.

One of the parachutists strode over slowly, like a spaceman, and checked.

"Yes, sir, he's dead, sir. Bullet entered the back of the head, sir. Killed no doubt immediately on impact, sir."

"Perfect," said the Commander, licking his lips. "A satisfactory execution."

My mother and Aileen were locked in an embrace, whimpering quietly. Perhaps because my legs had turned to jelly, I found myself unable to join them.

"Let that be a lesson to you all, men," the Commander said. "Now, clean the traitor up and place him in the coffin, where he belongs!"

No one moved.

"Do as I say!" the Commander screamed, waving his gun at the men. "Or you will suffer the same punishment."

Four men came forward. One got down on his knees and began to sponge Lyle's head wound. One applied shaving cream to his face, took a razor from his pocket, and shaved Lyle's chin. A third lifted his arms and sprayed deodorant under them, while the fourth took out a tie and began to feed it around Lyle's neck.

"Stop this!" yelled my mother. "He's dead. What the hell are you doing?"

"You know me, Ma'am," the Commander said. "I will not have my men looking shabby under any circumstances."

The parachutists folded Lyle's arms across his chest and carried him to the coffin.

"And never let it be said," shouted the Commander, "that our punishments do not fit our crimes, either."

But the parachutists were having some trouble fitting Lyle into the coffin.

"He's too tall, sir!" they called.

"What?"

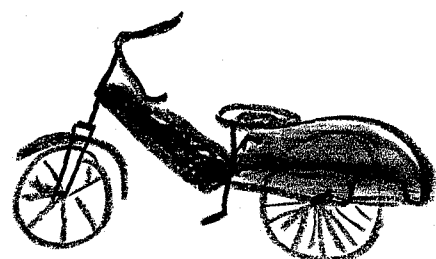
"We can't fit Lyle in, sir," explained Mike, who had made the coffin in the first place. "Chip Gainsborough was a shorter man."

"Saw off his feet, then, for God's sake," the Commander said.

"Yes, sir."

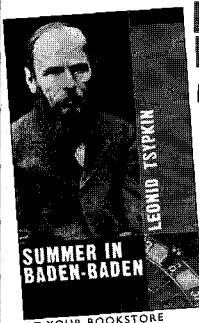
"No! Stop! Please! No more! Leave him some dignity!" my mother cried.

"Now, now, sweet, gentle, lovely Madam," said the Commander, trying desperately to be charming in spite of the dreadful atrocity he had just com-



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BOOTH

"I have a mango in the fridge that I can't deal with."

mitted. "Please do not concern yourself. My men have been trained to expect absolutely zero dignity should they attempt to undermine my authority."

"Help!" screamed my mother, looking up at the sky. "Someone, help us!"

Mike lined up a saw on poor Lyle's legs, and the teeth of the saw grazed his ankles and drew blood.

"Go on, then, Mike," the Commander said. "Saw them off!"

"Wait! Don't listen to him, Mike!" a voice cried.

It was Bud. He was standing with his legs astride like a cowboy, his pistol pointing at the Commander's head.

"Now, now, Bud. Whoa, there," the Commander said. "Easy, my deputy, my No. 2. Take it easy there, pal."

"Drop the weapon, Commander!" yelled Bud. "I'm serious! Game over!"

The Commander scowled, dropped the revolver, and put his hands on his head. "Now, now, don't do anything stupid, Bud," he said feebly, his voice cowering behind the barricade of his mustache.

"All I was doing was protecting the secrecy of our mission, and you know it."

"Well, I think you went a little too far, don't you?" said Bud. "I suggest you tell this terrified woman and her daughters what's going on. Tell them the truth about Chip!"

"Now, look here, Bud," the Commander said. "I was just doing my job. Put the gun down now or you're going to regret this. Remember who's in charge."

"Oh, I remember who's in charge, all right!" Bud said.

And, with that, he shot at the Commander's feet. The Commander danced to avoid the volley of bullets. He bucked and flinched and thrashed around like a fish on a hook before collapsing to his knees beside Lyle. He squeezed his hands in prayer until his knuckles went white.

"Now get up and tell them!" Bud said, when everything was quiet again. "Tell them before it's too goddam late!"

"O.K., O.K.," the Commander stammered, holding up his shaking palms. "O.K., just cool it, for Chrissakes."

He stood up slowly, mopped his brow with his sleeve, hoiked some phlegm from the back of his throat, and spat it on the ground. Bud stared at the glistening ball in disgust and then applied the same look to the Commander, who mumbled an apology and hastily scooped it up in a handkerchief and put it in his pocket.

"It's like this, Ma'am," the Commander said.

My mother's face was buried in her arms. She looked up. The tears on her cheeks were like slug trails.

"Ma'am, I am afraid I have been a little dishonest with you concerning the matter of the late Chip Gainsborough."

"Keep going, Commander," said Bud. "Tell them everything."

"There is no Chip Gainsborough," the Commander whispered. "And there never was."

It wasn't easy to take in what the Commander had said. I felt for a moment like a quiz-show contestant who has drawn blank on the easiest question in the universe.

"There is no such person," he continued. "End of story. He is a fake, a nonentity. He was never part of our outfit. He never parachuted. He doesn't exist and never did."

Aileen turned on Bud, tears streaming down her face. "This can't be true, Bud," she said. "You said Chip was your best buddy. You grew up together. You dived for sand dollars!"

"I know," he said. "But it was all lies. I was just carrying out orders. You see, it's all part of the Commander's strategy, isn't it, Commander?"

"Yes," said the Commander.

"Well, tell them, then, man!" screamed Bud.

"Our strategy, Ma'am," the Commander said, "is that, upon landing on civilian property, we pretend we have lost a parachutist."

"Pretend?" my mother said weakly.

"Correct. It makes us look more noble and heroic," the Commander said. "It gives us gravitas, and endears us to our hosts. It provides us with an aura of pathos, of bravery, of heroism, a chance to display our emotional range, our efficiency. It also means that the chosen family becomes more sympathetic to our cause. And so we pretend we lost a parachutist, and it helps us infiltrate a household much more easily."

"But," my mother stuttered, "but, if what you say is true, that means you killed poor Lyle for no reason at all."

"You are correct, Ma'am," said the Commander. "I did precisely that."

"You killed him for nothing?"

"That's exactly what he did, Ma'am," Bud said. "The Commander will go to any lengths to keep his mission a secret, won't you, Commander?"

The Commander nodded.

"What mission?" my mother whispered. "What are you saying? Why did you come here, and what did you want from us?"

"Later, Ma'am," said Bud, pushing my mother aside. "Right now I am going to avenge Lyle's death."

He narrowed an eye and took aim at the Commander.

My mother turned away. Aileen slumped to her knees. I closed my eyes and tried desperately to think of something nice. And for some inexplicable reason what I thought of was my father reading me a story in bed. It was a story about camels. And it had a happy ending. It was about two camels who save their master in a sandstorm.

But Aileen screamed and the camels vanished from my head, and so did my father.

"Please, Bud!" she yelled. "Whatever he's done, don't kill him. Two wrongs don't make a right. If you love me, no."

"Love you?" screamed Bud. "I don't love you, you whore. All I care about is this outfit and who leads it. Now, prepare to be dismissed, Commander!"

"Stop right there, Bud Mellors!" a voice boomed.

Bud froze.

"Who said that?"

"I did," said the voice. "If you kill the Commander, then I'll kill you! One move and you're dead!"

Bud turned to face the intruder.

It was Hank. The same Hank who had earlier brought back the pickup full of flowers, and his pistol was trained on Bud.

"You wouldn't," whispered Bud.

"Try me," said Hank.

"Ha!" Bud yelled nervously. "You really think you could kill me, Hanky boy?"

"Oh, I'll wipe you out, all right," Hank said calmly. "You've always been an ambitious little bastard. You've always brown-nosed the Commander and had your eye on his job. And now you want to see him

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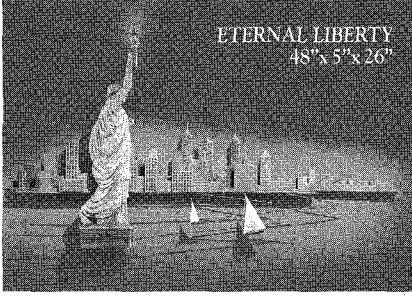
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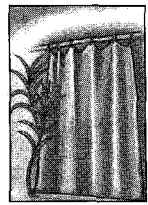
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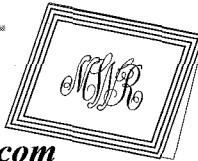
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out of the way so you can take over." He narrowed one eye and took aim. "Well, I'm sorry, but that's not the way it's going to be, buddy boy! So long forever!"

"Wait! Stop right there, Hank! Stop, before I put a bullet in your skull!"

Hank jumped and turned around to face the music. One of his comrades had stepped forward. It was Pete. Pete, who had blown the bugle so beautifully beside Chip Gainsborough's grave and had played his favorite song on my dad's guitar.

"If you kill Bud for killing the Commander, Hank, then the only flowers you'll be arranging are the ones on your grave."

The men glanced at each other, apparently confused by the logic of who was going to kill whom, and who would end up dead and who alive. And then, suddenly, out of nowhere, and in a moment of what seemed to be sheer panic, all the other parachutists drew their pistols and within seconds there was ear-splitting, splintering gunfire.

I threw myself to the ground and pretended to be dead. Bullets whizzed over my head. They shattered the windows of our house and ripped into the walls. Parachutists groaned as they fell heavily onto the ground around me. I closed my eyes tight and prayed that Aileen and my mother were doing exactly the same as me. Playing dead. Keeping out of the way.

And as I lay with my eyes shut tight I thought of the story about the camels again, and how well my father had done the voice of the camel. And then I imagined him sailing his boat directly against the wind somewhere near his house in San Francisco.

It seemed like forever before the shooting stopped, but it might have been only a matter of seconds. I kept still. I waited. I held my breath and counted slowly to a hundred. Then, ever so carefully, I lifted my head and turned my neck stiffly to the side.

No one was standing. Fifteen parachutists lay strewn on the ground. Pete had fallen over Greg's torso. Greg was lying with a hand in a pool of Hank's brains. Bud was sprawled at the feet of the Commander, whose back was peppered with bullet holes. The ground was stained with blood and gore. I could not see Mom or Aileen anywhere.

"Mom? Aileen? Aileen? Mom, are you there? Don't you leave me, too!" I yelled. "Don't go and leave me."

No one answered. All the blood drained out of my body and collected somewhere in my toes.

Finally, a voice said, "Ryder, honey?"

My heart jumped in my rib cage as if I had been bitten.

"Mom!"

"I'm O.K., darling," she said. "What about Aileen? Is Aileen O.K.?"

"I'm O.K., you guys!" Aileen called. "But, please, can you pick up their guns? I don't think I'll be able to get up until I know it's safe."

"Stay where you are, girls," my mother called.

She pulled herself to her feet and went tiptoeing among the bodies, foraging for the guns. She took them one at a time over to the house, wincing and holding them between two fingers, as if they were dead animals. She placed all the guns in a neat pile beside the front door. The last one she collected was the Commander's. He had died holding on to it so hard that she had to pry his fingers off one by one.

"All right," my mother said. "It's O.K., girls. I have disarmed every one of them. It's safe to get up."

"Are you sure they're all dead?" Aileen asked.

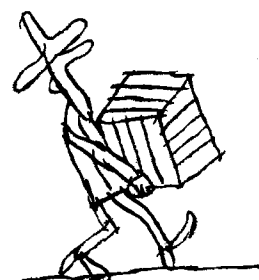
"Positive," said Mom.

The three of us stared at each other across the carnage. It felt as if a pulse were beating in my eyes. Later on, Aileen said she felt something like that, too. She said her eyes stepped out over the bodies first, and the rest of her came later. Anyhow, we ran into each other's arms and squeezed each other tightly.

"Thank God, my darlings," my mother said. "You're both alive."

"Jesus Christ!" cried Aileen, bursting into tears. "They're all dead! Fifteen of them, and look at the state of our house!"

She was right. There were holes in



the walls, and several windows were smashed. The house seemed shaken and disturbed by what had happened.

"What are we going to do?" I said.

"The first thing is to keep calm," my mother said. "We have done nothing wrong, remember, and it is not our fault that we were invaded by these evil parachutists. Now, go upstairs and pack a bag," she said. "Be quick, and try not to forget anything."

"Are we going away, Mom?"

"Yes, Ryder," said my mother. "You guessed it. We're going away. But first we have work to do."

Aileen and I ran upstairs. Meanwhile, my mother packed food in a cooler and made a thermos of coffee. Then we went outside and ushered the chickens out of the coops into cages, and loaded them onto the back of the pickup.

"Now for the tough part," my mother said.

We dragged each of the parachutists, one by one, across the ground. Aileen and I took a leg each and my mother gripped them by the wrists. We heaved them together into a pile, trying not to get blood on us, and as we did so we coated each parachutist in a layer of dust and dirt. Then I noticed something strange. Every dead parachutist had a smug kind of half smile and a look of extreme satisfaction on his face. It was as if by blowing each other to bits they had completed their mission and everything had gone perfectly swimmingly and according to plan after all.

When, at last, the Commander had been reunited with his men, my mother took a can of gasoline from the shed and doused the pile of parachutists. She soaked their clothes, their hair, their feet, everything.

"Honestly," my mom said, "is it just me or do I seem to spend my whole life cleaning up after men?" She sighed and wiped her hands on a rag. "Right, girls. That should just about do it. Now, ready to receive your instructions?"

"Go ahead, Mom."

"Aileen, get in the pickup," she said. "Drive it a good hundred yards away from the house and turn on the headlights. Ryder, untie the camels and secure them tightly to the side-view mirror. And make sure Nellie is with you, too."

Aileen and I did as our mother said.

We knew who was in command now.

"I don't believe this is happening," Aileen said as we sat in the pickup stroking Nellie and telling her everything was going to be O.K.

"Neither do I," I said.

"Bud seemed so sweet," she sniffed. And then she broke down in tears.

"Sis, he was an asshole," I said, putting a comforting arm around her shoulder. "They all were."

In a few minutes, my mother closed the door of the house and locked it. Then she strode calmly over to the pile of bodies, struck a match and tossed it on, and made a dash toward us. Behind her, flames were already clawing at the sky.

"Well, that's that, then," my mother said when she was safely in the driver's seat.

I unfolded a rug, and we laid it over our legs and turned off the headlights. We drank sweet coffee from the thermos and chewed on peanuts, as if we were at a drive-in movie.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said my mother. "You can't beat a good honest fire on a summer's evening."

"You sure can't," said Aileen.

"Is everyone O.K.?"

"Yes," I said. "I guess. And the camels are fine."

"Shaken, but O.K.," said Aileen.

"What horrible men," said Mom.

"They were despicable," said Aileen.

"Terrifying," I said.

My mother poured herself some more coffee.

"I guess they make your father seem like an archangel by comparison," she said.

Aileen and I exchanged a look as my mother drummed her fingers on the steering wheel.

"Well, maybe not quite an archangel," she said eventually.

Mom turned the key in the ignition and put the pickup into gear. We drove off slowly down the dirt road, the camels trotting alongside us.

"Where are we going, Mom?" I said.

"San Francisco," she said.

I smiled and turned to look out the rear window. Sparks were pouring up into the black night sky. They soared up and up and up, and I followed them all the way with my eyes, until they flickered, and flared briefly, and then vanished. ♦

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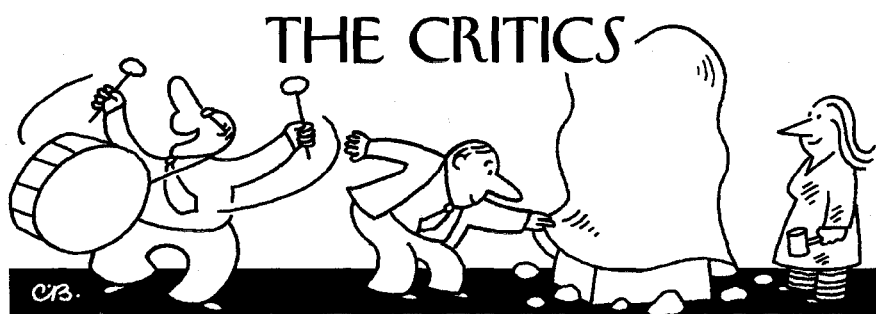
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A new collection of essays by a poet of despairing cheerfulness.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Of the eleven United States citizens who have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature since 1930, when Sinclair Lewis became the first American to be so honored, Czesław Miłosz, the 1980 winner, is the least well known to the American public. Lewis, Pearl Buck, Ernest Hemingway, and John Steinbeck were best-selling novelists, as have been, on occasion, Saul Bellow and Toni Morrison. William Faulkner's literary intransigence may have repelled middlebrow readers but fed into his eventually immense reputation; Eugene O'Neill dominated American drama as no playwright has since. Isaac Bashevis Singer wrote in Yiddish but was much published in English translation, and the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky brought to this continent the fame of defiant anti-Soviet dissidence and a game willingness to write both prose and verse in English. Miłosz, a friend and admirer of Brodsky's, has continued to write in Polish, although his education in the tongue of his adopted land includes four and a half years, following the Second World War, in the Washington diplomatic community. His permanent American residence dates from 1960, when he accepted a post in the Slavic department of the University of California at Berkeley. To the American literary establishment, the West Coast is out of sight and mind, and Miłosz's low visibility was reinforced when, with the collapse of the Iron Curtain, he could reforge his native connection with East-

ern Europe; he now, at the age of ninety, divides his residence between Berkeley and Kraków, Poland.

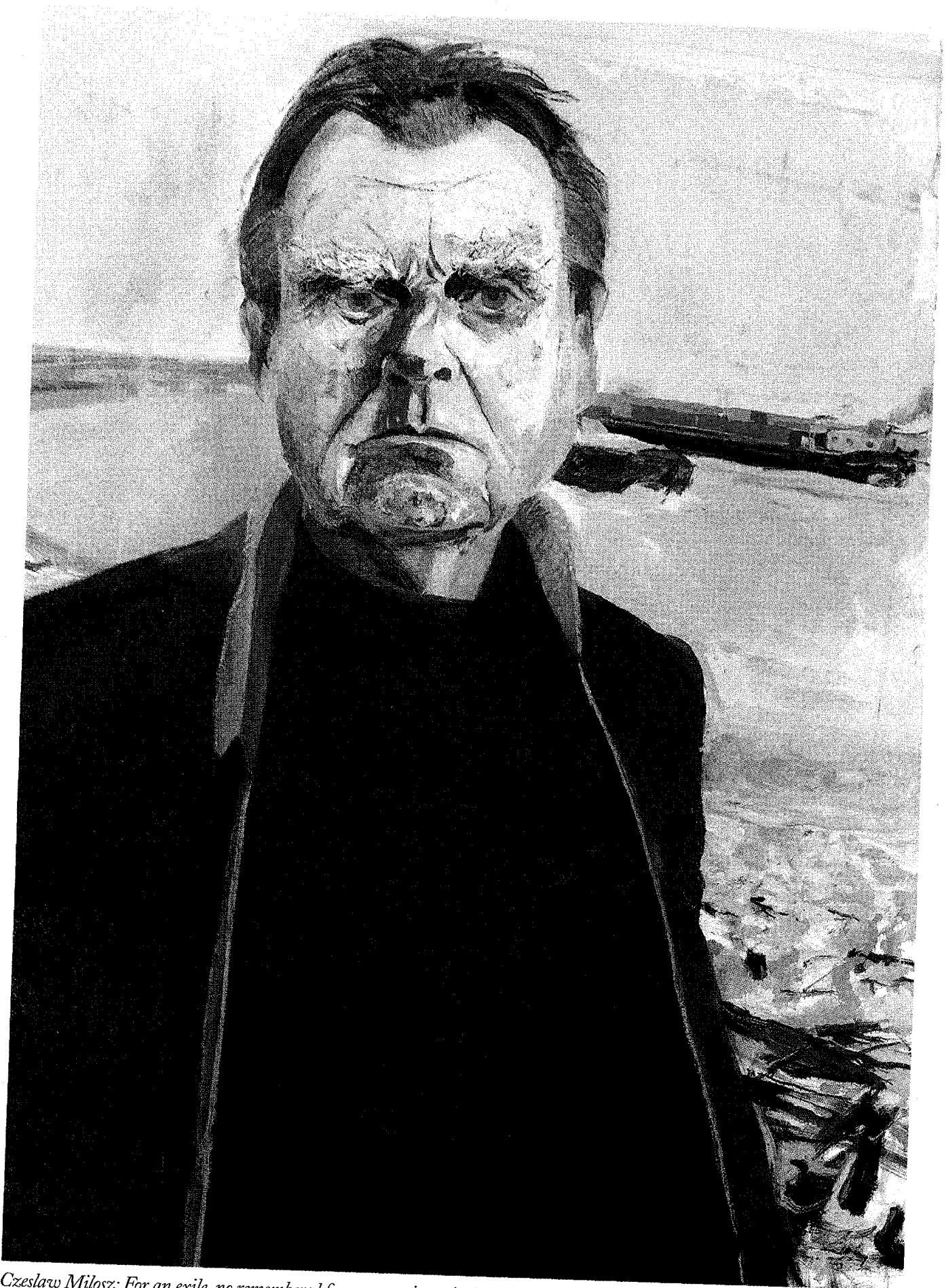
And yet this strange migratory bird nested within our republic has flourished here. In the handsome and substantial "New and Collected Poems 1931-2001," recently published by Ecco, four-fifths of the pages were written after 1960, and, remarkably, nearly a third after 1991, in Miłosz's eighties. This decade saw the appearance, first in Polish and then in English, of four collections of new poetry. In the year 2001, there has been a cascade of publications in addition to the collected poems: the reissue in a separate volume, and freshly translated by the author and Robert Hass, of Miłosz's long poem of 1957, "A Treatise on Poetry"; "Miłosz's ABC's," an alphabetically listed array of short essays, erudite, diverse, and autobiographical; and "To Begin Where I Am," a selection of prose pieces edited and with an introduction by Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline G. Levine, and translated from the Polish by many hands, including that of the author (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$30). The earliest piece was written in 1942, in the form of a letter, in dire wartime circumstances, and the latest, "Happiness," in the late nineteen-nineties, in the mellow sunset years of California exile and sentimental return to native soil. Written in English, and first published in 1998 in *Architectural Digest*, "Happiness" describes a visit to the

Lithuanian valley where Miłosz lived on his grandparents' farm for a period of childhood:

I was looking at a meadow. Suddenly the realization came that during my years of wandering I had searched in vain for such a combination of leaves and flowers as was here and that I have been always yearning to return. Or, to be precise, I understood this after a huge wave of emotion had overwhelmed me, and the only name I can give it now would be—bliss.

One is reminded of another Slavic celebrant of bliss, bliss tinted and twisted by the losses of exile, Vladimir Nabokov, who left America's haven just as Miłosz arrived. In "To Begin Where I Am," the author's brief opening statement, "My Intention," expresses the lifelong priority Miłosz has given to subjective specifics over abstract conceptions: "I have read many books, but to place all those volumes on top of one another and stand on them would not add a cubit to my stature. Their learned terms are of little use when I attempt to seize naked experience, which eludes all accepted ideas." He has striven to remain "free to be suspicious and to ask naïve questions"; his "certainty of having something important to say to the world, something no one else will be called to say" is weakened by "the thought of all the people who ever were, are, and ever will be," and the likelihood that "our books in their brightly colored jackets will be added to the mass of things in which names and titles sink and vanish." Still, he keeps writing, in accents simultaneously lofty and intimate.

Neither his essays nor his poetry ventures far from the substance of his life: his birth, to ethnically Polish parents, in Lithuania, which was part of the Russian Empire up to 1918, so that children in school were forbidden to speak any other language; his years attending high school in Vilnius, the ancient Lithuanian capital (Wilno in Polish); his move, in 1937, to Warsaw, where he endured the Second World War, writing "idyllic verses" and taking an active part in the anti-Nazi underground; his postwar diplomatic service on behalf of Communist Poland (though he was never himself a Party member); his defection to Paris in 1951 and his eventual United States residence and citizenship. Such a



Czesław Miłosz: For an exile, no remembered face or scene is too incidental to clarify the basic mystery of being.

life—unlike, say, that of Wordsworth or Wallace Stevens—cannot be imported into poetry without threatening to steal the show from the reflections and expressions it engenders. The footnote to the poem “With Her,” for example, written in Berkeley in 1985, consists of this glimpse into the agonized tangle of a ravaged Europe, with its paradoxes:

In 1945, during the big resettlements of population at the end of World War II, my family left Lithuania and was assigned quarters near Danzig (Gdansk) in a house belonging to a German peasant family. Only one old German woman remained in the house. She fell ill with typhus and there was nobody to take care of her. In spite of admonitions motivated partly by universal hatred for the Germans, my mother nursed her, became ill herself, and died.

It is with a survivor’s authority of witness that Milosz disputes, in an essay on Boris Pasternak, the critics of “Doctor Zhivago” who objected to the novel’s wealth of coincidental meetings: “Anyone who has lived through wars and revolutions knows that in a human anthill on fire the number of extraordinary meetings, unbelievable coincidences, multiplies tremendously in comparison with periods of peace and everyday routine.”

His experience of the anthill on fire is not pressed upon the reader; rather, it emerges indirectly, often, in prose, by way of biographies of friends and fellow-poets who did not

survive, whose fates landed them among the enforcers of Fascist or Communist ideology. Milosz’s poetry touches on the war years in a guarded, reticent voice of glancing memory and veiled allusion. But in a long and eventually published letter to his fellow-writer Jerzy Andrzejewski, one of a series composed in 1942 and 1943, he speaks in a sterner, more immediate voice, that of a Roman Catholic intellectual surrounded by horror, at the heart of a moral catastrophe, in occupied Poland, which the Germans themselves called “the cloaca of the world.” It is not given to every writer to be present at the collapse of civilization. Milosz writes, “The habits of civilization have a certain enduring quality and the Germans in occupied Western Europe were obviously embarrassed and concealed their aims, where in Poland they acted completely openly.” In another essay, he declares, “What we beheld surpassed the most daring and the most macabre imagination.” To Andrzejewski he reports, with an anthropological detachment, the disappearance around him of “a ceremonious attitude toward death”:

It is a different matter when, as today, new ideas are being born—for example, the idea of the mass extermination of people, akin to the extermination of bedbugs or flies. . . . A certain insectivity of life and death, as I’d like to call it, is created. I suspect that we are beginning to look at man partly as a living piece of meat with tufts of hair on his head and his sexual organs, partly as an amusing toy that

speaks, moves—but all one has to do is raise one’s hand and squeeze the trigger and an ordinary object is lying in the same place, as inert as wood and stone. Who knows, perhaps this is the path to absolute indifference, including indifference to one’s own death. It may happen that with good training and appropriate schooling people will die easily, from a lack of desire; they will treat dying as almost an everyday activity, between two shots of vodka and a cigarette that they won’t get to smoke.

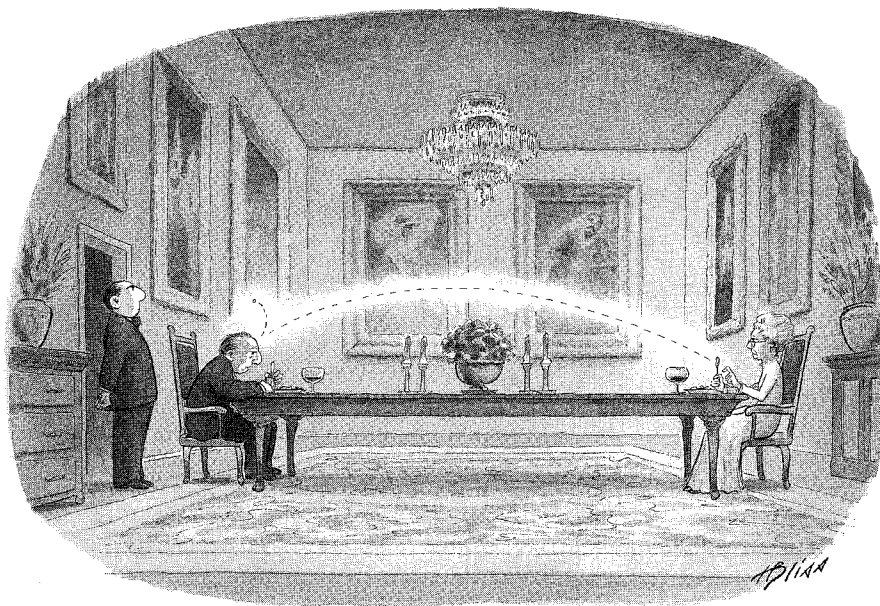
He seeks, amid the orgy of sadism and sudden death in Poland, “a reliable foundation apart from any faith,” and comes up with humanity’s “ethical instinct,” while admitting the plasticity of ethical schemes: “A German, a model son, husband, loving father of a family, will torment a subhuman, a Jew or a Soviet soldier, because he is obsessed with his vision of duty and justice, which commands him to cleanse Europe of similar vermin.” Concluding his debate with Andrzejewski (whose replies, in an exchange of nine letters, have been published in Polish but not English), Milosz takes his own ethical stand within the Catholic Church, apart from “the path of Humanism and the Reformation.” All too smoothly, he sketches a progression from Luther to Rousseau and Nietzsche and thence to the Nazi “worshippers of the magnificent beast in man” and Alfred Rosenberg, the infamous minister of the German-occupied eastern territories and the author of racist theories that radicalized the young Hitler.

Milosz, remaining true to the teachings of his childhood’s priestly instructors, is still a practicing Catholic. This fact seems to leave him, as much as anything, bemused. The poem “Helene’s Religion,” from the 1998 collection “Road-Side Dog,” might well describe his own:

On Sunday I go to church and pray with all the others.
Who am I to think I am different?
—Enough that I don’t listen to what the priests blabber in their sermons.
Otherwise, I would have to concede that I reject common sense.

It goes on to express a credo, a quasi-Thomist proof:

It’s not up to me to know anything about Heaven or Hell.
But in this world there is too much ugliness and horror.



So there must be, somewhere, goodness and truth.
And that means somewhere God must be.

In the essay "If Only This Could Be Said" (1991), he attempts to tackle his religion frontally: "Ought I to try to explain 'why I believe'? I don't think so. It should suffice if I attempt to convey the coloring or tone. If I believed that man can do good with his own powers, I would have no interest in Christianity. But he cannot, because he is enslaved to his own predatory, domineering instincts, which we may call *proprium*, or self-love." He writes as one on the settled far shore of the struggle to believe, but evidence of his struggle comes in two essays, written in English, on two theologians who impressed and moved him during the fifties: Simone Weil and Lev Shestov. While not tempted to imitate Weil's suicidally ascetic life style, he admires the severe purity of her answer to the problem of evil, of suffering, of God's apparent abdication from the affairs of the world. Weil affirms the earthly domination of *la pesanteur*—gravity—and its laws, which she calls necessity: "The absence of God is the most perfect testimony of perfect love, and that is why pure necessity, necessity which is manifestly different from the good, is so beautiful." In other words: "Creation is an abdication. But [God] is omnipotent in the sense that his abdication is voluntary." Our task is "to love God through and across the destruction of Troy and Carthage, and without consolation. Love is not consolation, it is light." God does grant, amid the universal determinism, grace, an emanation from a realm beyond the range of mechanical necessity: "Impossibility is the door of the supernatural. We can only knock at it. Someone else opens it." With a certain mathematical rigor (Weil, originally a teacher of philosophy, was well versed in mathematics and physics), she travels a sweeping *via negativa* to arrive back at traditional Christian assertions.

Shestov, a Ukrainian born in 1866, debated with the once famous Christian apologist Nikolai Berdyaev, and was listed by Camus as one of the spokesmen for the new "man of the absurd." As paraphrased by Milosz, Shestov, following Dostoevsky's "Notes from Underground," was what Plato called a *misolo-*

gos, a hater of reason; rather than play the game of chess proposed by the philosophers of reason, which is stoic acquiescence, Shestov "overturns the table with a kick," asking, "Why should the 'I' accept 'wisdom,' which obviously violates its most intense desire? Why respect 'the immutable laws'?" Overturning the table with the kick is a gesture that would appeal to Milosz's natural gaiety, his "despairing cheerfulness," though it perhaps makes light of the materialist table's real *pesanteur*. But the ultimate measure of gravity is each person's death, and, to one who lived through a time of "dying as almost an everyday activity," lightness may enter in. Milosz is one of the last of the literary believers conspicuous in the fifties; he translated Weil and T. S. Eliot into Polish, and it was thanks to his reading of Shestov that he and Joseph Brodsky "were able to understand each other intellectually."

"To Begin Where I Am," whose American editors have aimed it away from the Polish arcana abundant in "Milosz's ABC's," contains essays on Brodsky, and on Pasternak, Eliot, Robert Frost, and Robinson Jeffers, but none of these poets excite the detailed, vivifying explication awarded the two theological thinkers. Copiously read, at home in a fistful of languages, and a boyhood naturalist as well, Milosz gives the impression of a man rooted in his own existence, which theology and history have penetrated more deeply than have other people's attempts at literature. A self acquires its substance early, and such essays on youthful experience as "Dictionary of Wilno Streets" and "Journey to the West" are the most full-blooded. The latter, recounting a hiking and paddling trip he and two friends, called Elephant and Robespierre, took to Paris in 1931, is idyllic yet ominous; the many German juveniles they meet on the road and in youth hostels are polite but repel all attempts by the Slavic boys to make contact. Remembering the dormitories they shared, Milosz writes, "The future was already there, among those beds. Today I sometimes think that Elephant's closest neighbor could have been the Gestapo officer who later tortured him during questioning." The jovial, gentle Elephant, whose mind was "liberal and skeptical, resistant to the temptations of heroism," jumped from a window to his death after

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being tortured. A different fate awaited the severe, bony Robespierre, the trio's leader. His shrill voice was broadcast on the Moscow radio, and by 1950 he had become portly and a "high-ranking Stalinist bureaucrat" in Warsaw. Other essays use old friends to illumine, like tracer bullets, the violence that beset Poland. In 1943, Warsaw's Jewish ghetto rebelled and its residents were butchered in reprisal; in 1944, the Polish underground, activated by a command order from the London government in exile, staged an uprising, which the Germans quelled in a two-month battle while the Russian Army, just across the Vistula River, halted its advance and let the insurgents, who would have obstructed the Communists' intended reordering of Poland, be wiped out. Many young people known to Milosz died in "these frenzies of voluntary self-sacrifice"; the Germans deported the remaining population and razed the city, before retreating west to their own doom. But Milosz does not remember only the victims of violence; he recalls his cousin the French poet Oscar Milosz; a Polish actress who murdered her lover at his own request and became a nun after being pronounced not guilty; and, in "Miss Anna and Miss Dora," a pair of "old, poor, and helpless" spinsters, for little more reason than that "no one but me remembers their names anymore." For an exile, no remembered face or scene is too incidental to clarify the basic mystery of being.

Milosz's poetic project, like Whitman's, is to sing the man, the whole man, not the partial man of the modern avant-garde, which has "created out of the poet a creature with a head covered with mathematical lumps, with exceptionally large lenses for its eyes, and suffering from atrophy of the heart and liver." He would counter such "narrowing and desiccation" with a broad realism: "I seek in poems a revelation of reality, of what is known in Greek as *epifaneia*." Again: "Language must name reality, which exists objectively, massive, tangible, and terrifying in its concreteness." Yet traumatic reality requires "the distance necessary to transform this material artistically." In "Ruins and Poetry," one of the Norton lectures Milosz gave in 1981-82 at Harvard, he states, "The reality of the war years is a great subject, but a great subject

is not enough and it even makes inadequacies in workmanship all the more visible." The "many terrifying poems" born of the Holocaust as it was happening last less well than poems more elliptical and plain, even rudimentary, in diction: transcribing the breakdown of civilization, "man constructs poetry out of the remnants found in ruins."

Many sorts of poet leave Milosz dissatisfied: the "Communist orators" Éluard and Aragon; the reflexive pessimists Frost and Larkin; and those who, like Francis Ponge and Wallace Stevens, replace the "suchness" of things with "purely intellectual deconstruction into their component parts." He confesses, "Often these are dazzlingly intelligent constructions, but I find very little in them for myself." For himself, he likes in poetry "the tension that derives from contradictions." He praises Eliot for his "almost unbelievable undertaking: he built out of impossibility, absence, ruins." Cultural confusion and fragmentation have occurred before: "Renaissance man lamented the chaos that surrounded and inhabited him, but that is precisely what led to the greatness of Marlowe and Shakespeare." The situation of Renaissance man, torn between the wisdom of the Church and the wisdom of the rediscovered ancients, between faith and reason, between, like Hamlet, the sins of action and of inaction, remains modern man's situation, and Milosz urges resistance to the "nihilizing pressures" of such monisms as materialism and Buddhism:

Alas, our fundamental experience is duality: mind and body, freedom and necessity, evil and good, and certainly world and God. It is the same with our protest against pain and death. In the poetry I select [in his anthology "A Book of Luminous Things"], I am not seeking an escape from dread but, rather, proof that dread and reverence can exist within us simultaneously.

A believer full of reasonable doubts, an American with his heart in Lithuania and his mind in a vanished Warsaw and a persistent Paris ("The most amazing thing about Paris for me is that it still exists"), a large-minded essayist distrustful of engagement in the European sense but by no means disengaged, a Californian fond of our nature but cool toward our culture, Milosz declines to be type-cast, a giant elusive in our midst. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Feast of the Goat, by Mario Vargas Llosa, translated from the Spanish by Edith Grossman (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$25). Rafael Trujillo was an archetypal dictator, a military man who seized control of the Dominican Republic in 1930 and remained in power—bullying his people and amassing a huge fortune in the process—until he was assassinated, in 1961. He's a perfect subject for Vargas Llosa, who has always balanced his interest in narrative innovations with a devotion to Latin-American politics. This fictional biography crosscuts between Trujillo's ascension and his final days in power, aspiring to—and often achieving—a kind of Shakespearean mix of high tragedy and low comedy, as Trujillo's excesses become ever more grotesque and fantastical. Only the addition of Urania Cabral, an attorney in New York who finally returns home to make peace with her father, a former member of Trujillo's inner circle, remains unconvincing.

The Same Sea, by Amos Oz, translated from the Hebrew by Nicholas de Lange and the author (Harcourt; \$24). The Israeli novelist has said that he sees his latest work as a piece of choral music, "a polyphonic assembly of voices." In fact, it is a prose poem describing the lives of four people brought together by death: Albert, an aging tax lawyer whose wife recently died of ovarian cancer; his son Enrico, who flees to Tibet; Enrico's girlfriend, Dita, a voluptuous screenwriter; and Bettine, a widowed accountant who is drawn into an uncomfortable intimacy with Albert. Oz made his name as a political novelist, but this book, at once melancholic and sensual, mentions the peace process only once. Here Oz is more interested in why we choose to live among others, knowing that we die alone: in the end, he suggests, it's for the shared plea-

tures of our physical existence—whether that pleasure is food, sex, or the sound of waves outside the window.

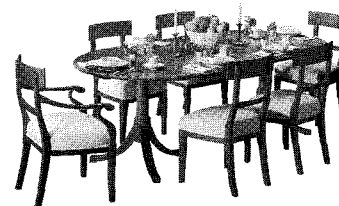
For Rouenna, by Sigrid Nunez (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$22). Does a fat friend from the old neighborhood have a legitimate claim on us? In Nunez's new novel, the narrator, a writer living in Manhattan, receives a fan letter from Rouenna Zycinski, a forgotten acquaintance from the Staten Island projects of her youth. Decades earlier, Rouenna was a combat nurse in Vietnam; now—she disconcertingly announces after several beers in an Indian restaurant—she wants someone to help her write her story. This portrait of a friendship expands into an unnerving examination of individual and national shame as Nunez itemizes our ties to all we try to deny or ignore: the disabled vet; the demented downstairs neighbor; the half-dressed father chasing his naked daughter through the playground; the mountains of garbage silently rising across the river.

All Souls Day, by Cees Nooteboom, translated from the Dutch by Susan Massotty (Harcourt; \$25). When Arthur Daane, a Dutch documentary filmmaker, isn't flying off to Guatemala or Estonia, he takes to the streets of Berlin, shooting footage of its scarred history and ongoing reconstruction—"pieces of a giant puzzle only he would be able to fit together." Daane, who has lost his family in a plane crash, is trying to rebuild his own life among a polyglot circle of friends who meet at Schultz's *Weinstube* to talk about Hegel and the fine distinctions between types of sausage. A chance encounter with a mysteriously scarred young woman inspires a reawakening of passion—with shattering consequences. Not the least of the novel's satisfactions is the deftness with which Nooteboom incorporates signposts of Western high culture into his densely observant narrative, from Homer to Walter Benjamin—whom Daane, the indefatigable walker, wants to document in a film entitled "The Soles of Memory."



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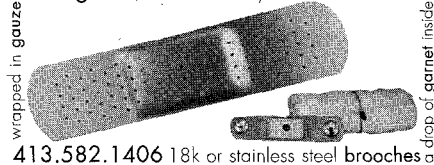
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THE CURRENT CINEMA

GOOD FIGHTS

"The Lord of the Rings," "Ali," and "Black Hawk Down."

BY DAVID DENBY

In "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring," elongated wizards chew on fleecy white beards and say things like "Eee-vill is stirring in Mordor." The diminutive hobbits, innocent creatures of Middle-earth, are scampering and puckish—they tumble a lot and wear cute little hoods. There are, perhaps, one too many blackened caverns, and there's definitely too much chanting by a male chorus on the soundtrack. The movie is almost three hours long, and it repeats itself more often than a talkative cabbie driving out to the nether regions of Middle-Brooklyn. There are hardly any women on the screen, and when my mind slipped away from the picture, as it did now and then, I had visions of Carol Burnett, who used to do great movie parodies, flying about in a wizard's cap and choking on her chin feathers. As you can see, I resisted this thing a little bit. Kids may not be reading Tolkien as much as they once did, but in recent years his influence has soaked into teen culture. I've had to feign interest when my boys began collecting the indecipherable Magic cards, which feature wild things and sorcerers and such sub-Tolkien remarks as "The hunted can become the fiercest hunter." "Eee-vill" is also a regular feature in the agitated-electron world of video games, in which fantasy collapses into perpetual combat. Since this is only the first of three Tolkien battle epics, you'd better get used to your children walking into the living room and saying, "The ring has awakened. It hears its master's call."

But, having stated the terms of my resistance, I have to admit that I capitulated soon enough. Once it gets going (the preliminaries are exhausting), and you get used to its peculiar idiom, "The Lord of the Rings" is consistently beautiful and often exciting—despite some dead passages here and there, it's surely the best big-budget fantasy movie in years. The New Zealander director

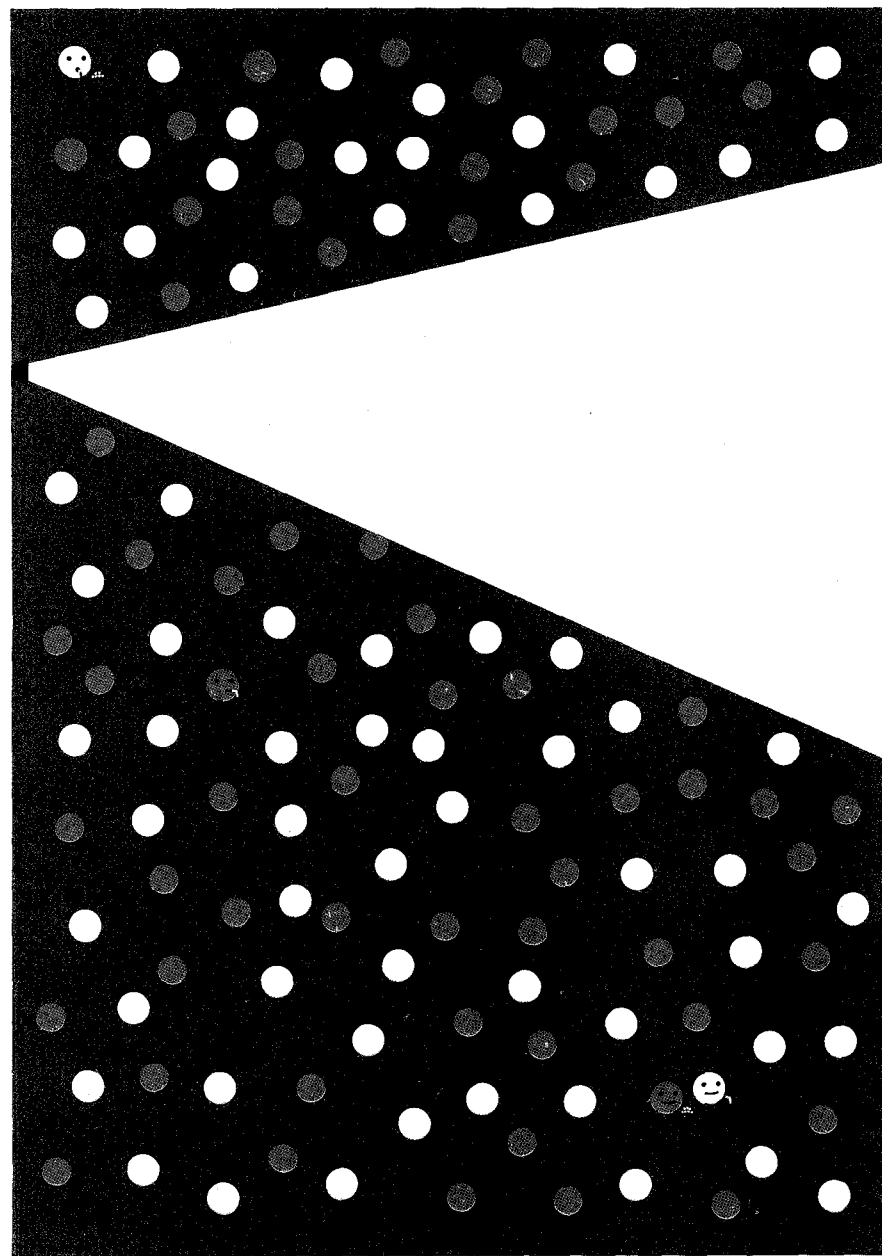
Peter Jackson ("Heavenly Creatures"), who also wrote the screenplay with Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens, works with enough dramatic tension and pictorial grandeur to sustain us through long periods of complicated exposition and prolonged bouts of swordplay. Reduced to its main lines, the movie is about the young hobbit Frodo (Elijah Wood), who has been entrusted with the ring that rules all, a ring so dangerous that it corrupts everyone who comes near it. Wood has troubled blue eyes, and every time his Frodo gets into a jam and puts the ring on his finger he sees what looks like a fiery sliver of earth bearing down on him, and he experiences an unspeakable dread. The sliver, in fact, is the eye of the vile Sauron, Lord of Mordor. Sauron has at his disposal an army of orcs—misshapen beasts with mucky gray faces—and he wants to seize the ring so that he can destroy Middle-earth, including the green land of the Shire, where the hobbits live. What to do? With a little help, Frodo realizes that the only salvation lies in conveying the ring to the flaming Mount Doom, in Mordor, where it was forged, and melting it into nothingness. He sets off on this unusual quest—going toward evil rather than away from it—accompanied by a band of irregulars, including the wizard Gandalf (Sir Ian McKellen), two noble human warriors (Viggo Mortensen and Sean Bean), an intemperate, black-bearded dwarf (John Rhys-Davies), and a variety of nattering hobbits. Like many epics, the movie is about the testing of a young man. Frodo must suffer, "die," be reborn, then tempted, and all the rest.

Quite a lot of screen time is needed to get all the plot information out of the wizardly beards and into our ears, in part because the movie wants to tell us what happened centuries ago and how it affects the present. There are apocalyptic, flame-seared flashbacks, and,

even if we can't sort out all the references and echoes, we may be impressed by the doomy weight of civilizations rising and falling—the epic span of Tolkien's myth. In the present, the group passes through many trials, each with its own fantastic setting. "The Lord of the Rings" was shot in New Zealand, a paradise still largely devoid of people,

heroes; at night, we can see into the blackness.

It's in the DNA of quest movies, I suppose, to be episodic: Frodo and his companions rush to get somewhere or other until they run into a fearsome obstacle or fire-breathing danger, which they overcome, escaping at the last second, and the quest then moves onto new



RICHARD MCGUIRE

and the landscapes—jagged mountains, dark, thickset glens, limitless plains—are both romantic and heroic, like the illustrations from an old children's classic. The shapes and colors of the terrain aren't quite familiar to us, and the strangeness has been enhanced by digital artists. In the woods, the leaves gather up from the ground and fly toward our

turf, where the group faces new perils and thrills. Some of the episodes require no more information than we've been granted—the business of the Ringwraiths, for instance, faceless, black-shrouded riders pursuing the hobbits on black horses. The wraiths are men who have succumbed to the power of the ring, soul-destroyed crea-

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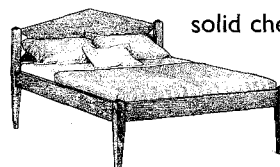
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tures who serve a merely spectacular function. It would have been nice, however, if Liv Tyler, as Arwen, the Elf princess, had been given more to do than emerge out of the ether and look longingly at Viggo Mortensen. Who is she? The women are stunning but essentially decorative; Cate Blanchett, with her idiosyncratic, translucent beauty—the pale skin and golden hair of a storybook maiden—makes an amazing appearance in shimmering white robes as Galadriel, the Lady of the Wood, but, like Tyler, she casts a blessing and disappears. The emotional life of the movie takes place entirely among men, who travel and fight side by side, destroying the endless supply of disgusting orcs with sword and bow and arrow. The men are held together by dedication and loyalty. Even the ambiguous character played by the malevolent-looking Sean Bean, a man susceptible to the ring's corrupting power, is sanctified by the quest and is rewarded with a magnificent death. At the end, some stay to defend Middle-earth, some travel to Mordor. The quest goes on and on.

Muhammad Ali, in his clamorous prime, was a loudmouth worth listening to, a showboat who lived up to his boasts, a bewildering mixture of cruelty and gentleness, and perhaps, after Sugar Ray Robinson, the greatest boxer of the twentieth century. He was a remarkable camera subject, and a terrific microphone subject, too—there was Kentucky music in his voice, a lit of malice and wit, a driving energy of mischief that carried one happily through his most outrageous taunts and fantasies. With the utmost guile, Ali played the fool, the lunatic, the narcissistic young man, disarming his opponents and then forcing those who put him down to eat their words. In Michael Mann's bio-pic "Ali," Will Smith is not as tall as Ali, but he's got himself imposingly muscled up. The makeup artists have flattened his ears and reshaped his cheekbones, forehead, and lips, and Smith has done his best to take over Ali's flesh—he has developed the slow-moving meditativeness of a big-bodied man, and he has the right music in his voice. He's also developed Ali's habit, in a fight, of skipping away from a punch and whirling

clockwise around the canvas, shoulders shifting and fists wheeling in synch as he balances his weight. Smith's arms are long enough to "yardstick" his opponent—Ali's way of extending his left arm to a boxer's forehead and holding him off. But nothing can match the speed of Ali's punch, and the boxing scenes, despite much hard work and the presence of authentic fighters in the ring with Smith, don't come close to the savagery of the real thing.

Bio-pics always seem a bit of a lost cause, a case of wearying calculation and craft struggling to recapture the incandescence of natural genius. In this case, one has to say that Smith doesn't have Ali's happy spontaneity—the irrepressible desire of the cockiest kid on the block always to be at the center of things. Smith has slowed Ali's tempo and softened his jeers. He bears roughly the same relation to the historical Ali that Dustin Hoffman's plaintive, nice young fellow bore to the historical Lenny Bruce in "Lenny." The movie covers ten years in Ali's life, beginning with the first Sonny Liston fight, in 1964, when Ali took the heavyweight championship at the age of twenty-two, and ending with the near-mythological "Rumble in the Jungle," in Zaire, in 1974, when he won the title back (from George Foreman) after being stripped of it for refusing to be inducted into the Army during the Vietnam War. It depicts his relations with Malcolm X (portrayed as an altogether benign figure) and other members of the Nation of Islam, three of his four wives, and a host of friends. Michael Mann is a fluent, evocative filmmaker, and the movie is well written, expertly staged, and beautifully edited. I especially loved the back-and-forth patter among Ali's entourage, played by a wonderful group of actors, including Jamie Foxx, Jeffrey Wright, and Giancarlo Esposito, who let the hipster dialogue flow through their bodies like electricity. And Mykelti Williamson, as the wild-haired fight promoter Don King, has a few moments of high-flown bunco in which he outdoes even Ali in nonsensical grandiloquence. Yet, despite the movie's many excellences, and its great good humor, I couldn't help feeling that the entire enterprise had been hampered by a fatal lack of purpose and

dramatic shape. "Ali" doesn't tell us anything new about its hero, and watching it feels at times like an exercise in historical piety. The racism of the early sixties has partially faded; the sight of Ali breaking the mold of good conduct and doing things his own way, converting to Islam, and so on, no longer provokes and disturbs the way it did decades ago. Ali is now universally loved, but the movie doesn't show how divisive he was, how he served as a flash point for millions, and so it has the unintentional effect of congratulating contemporary audiences for being on the right side of opinions that they once may have had trouble accepting at all.

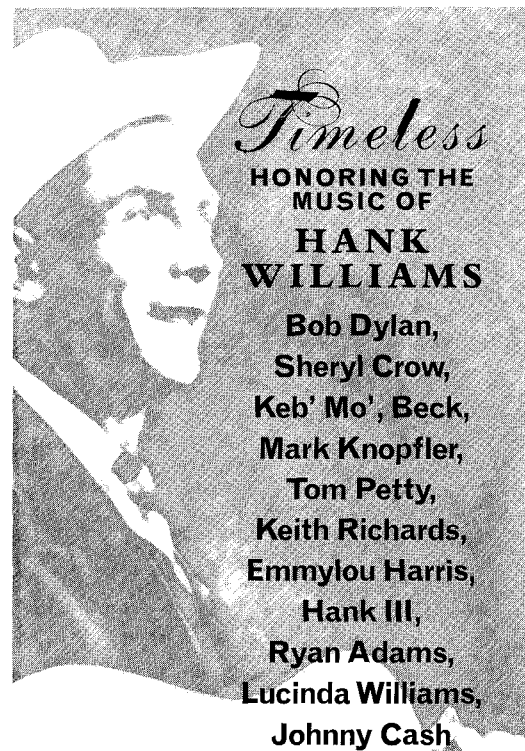
Redemption has always seemed too grand a notion to be applied to a pecuniary phenomenon like the movie business, but I'll be damned if the producer Jerry Bruckheimer ("Top Gun," "The Rock," "Con Air," "Pearl Harbor") and the director Ridley Scott (recently, "Gladiator" and the dreadful "Hannibal") haven't renounced their sins and knocked boldly on the door of virtue. Their war movie "Black Hawk Down" (opening December 28th) is absolutely first-rate. This account of the ill-fated Special Forces adventure in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993, which resulted in the death of eighteen Americans, is spectacular in all the good ways—it's exceptionally violent but also truthful to the pain and disorder of battle, and it shows, in detail, how the special-operations guys fight through a maze of streets, and what goes right and what goes wrong in one of these dangerous forays. "Black Hawk Down" is a combat film, with only minor preliminaries and the briefest of epilogues. The episode in Mogadishu, of course, has been cited by Osama bin Laden as an example of American weakness (soon after the incident, President Clinton pulled the Special Forces out of Somalia), and may even have been a factor in bin Laden's calculations of how Americans would respond to an attack on their own soil. The point of the movie—though it is never stated ex-

plicitly—is that the operation demonstrated not weakness but strength, that it was an exceptionally noble failure of which the country should be proud. The Delta and Ranger forces, based at the airport outside the city, moved into the center of town by helicopter and Humvee, rendezvousing at a building in the middle of a neighborhood controlled by the warlord General Muhammad Farah Aidid. They fulfilled their mission, which was to kidnap several of Aidid's lieutenants, who were attending a meeting, but first one and then another helicopter was shot down, and groups of soldiers, who might easily have escaped, remained in the city to rescue any survivors. The American presence, it turned out, had stirred up a hornet's nest of resistance: hundreds of Aidid's armed men, perched on rooftops, in doorways, at windows, behind piles of junk, came out to take a shot. The casualties, as the movie (based on the best-selling book by Mark Bowden) tells it, were caused in part by the men's loyalty to one another and their "leave no one behind" ethos.

Ridley Scott has always shown enormous facility with the camera, but it sometimes degenerates into pretty pictorialism. At the beginning of "Black Hawk Down," there are dangerously gorgeous shots of the helicopters passing over a sparkling beach, but then the movie settles down to business, with a grim but stirring purposefulness that never lets up. The script, by Ken Nolan, is terse (much of it consists of military jargon muttered into receivers). The filmmakers seem to be saying that war itself is a language, a repertoire of ritualized gestures: hunt, hide, expose, shoot, kill, die. From start to finish, the cast members (including Josh Hartnett, Tom Sizemore, and Sam Shepard) remain entirely submerged in their roles. I've rarely seen so selfless a collection of performances and, in a war movie, so general an absence of rhetoric or guff. As it happens, the movie possesses an ideal temper for wartime—matter-of-fact, stoic, resolute, defiant. ♦

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2001: THE QUIZ

1. What is the goal of the Ronald Reagan Legacy Project?

(a) To name at least one significant landmark or institution in each of the fifty states after Ronald Reagan.

(b) To name at least one significant landmark or institution in each of the nation's 3,142 counties after Ronald Reagan.

(c) To replace Alexander Hamilton's image on the ten-dollar bill with a portrait of Ronald Reagan.

(d) All of the above.

2. What did Turner Broadcasting executive Garth Ancier say "thrilled" him after the terrorist attacks?

(a) The way Rudy Giuliani dealt with the disaster.

(b) The support offered to the United States by other nations.

(c) CNN's being the first to incorporate the American flag into its onscreen logo.

(d) Not receiving an anthrax letter.

Match the movie with the blurb.

3. "Pearl Harbor."

4. "Joe Dirt."

5. "Freddy Got Fingered."

6. "Swordfish."

7. "Domestic Disturbance."

(a) "Quite simply the worst movie ever released by a major studio in Hollywood history."

(b) "Defiantly, extravagantly average."

(c) "The cinema of morons made by morons for morons."

(d) "So TV-movie-of-the-week that you wonder throughout why you can't use a remote to find a decent ballgame."

(e) "There's just something so sexy about a doofus dunked in excrement."

8. True or false: The White House chief of staff, Andrew Card, told NBC's Tim Russert that George W. Bush "read more documents, I mean, very thick documents, about the stem-cell issue."

Match the politician with his or her words or deeds:

9. Rep. J. C. Watts (R-Okla.).

10. Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.).

11. Rep. Barbara Cubin (R-Wyo.).

12. Rep. John Cooksey (R-La.).

13. Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.).

14. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.).

(a) Complained that Senator James Jeffords mounted a "coup of one."

(b) Suggested that former President Bill Clinton could be impeached again for pardoning Marc Rich.

(c) Jammed a parking ticket he received for violating airport-security rules under the badge of the police officer who issued it.

(d) Advised security personnel to be especially wary of anyone "that's got a diaper on his head and a fan belt wrapped around the diaper on his head."

(e) Revealed that Senator Strom Thurmond is "not mentally keen."

(f) Tried in vain to force Hilary Rosen, the president of the Recording Industry Association of America, to recite the lyrics to Eminem's "Kill You" at a hearing on entertainment marketing.

15. How funny did Mike Cidoni, a critic for Ackerley Group Television, find the movie "Rat Race"?

(a) "Spleen-burstingly funny."

(b) "Kidney-failingly funny."

(c) "Sphincter-relaxingly funny."

(d) "Brain-hemorrhagingly funny."

16. Who is Dave Manning?

(a) The New Jersey man who claimed his forty-six-million-dollar lottery prize by mailing in his winning ticket.

(b) The New Mexico professor who got in trouble for saying, "Anyone who can blow up the Pentagon has my vote."

(c) The contestant who got kicked off "Big Brother 2" after holding a knife to the throat of a woman and asking, "Would you get mad if I killed you?"

(d) The fake critic invented by Sony to provide favorable blurbs for its films.

Who's who?

17. Kelly Preston.

18. David Westin.

19. Natasha Lyonne.

20. Jo Moore.

21. Michael Ovitz.

(a) The celebrity whose response upon being stopped on suspicion of drunk driving was "I'm a movie star. Can I talk to my entertainment lawyer?"

(b) The network-news president who said that journalists should take no position on whether the terrorist attacks were "right or wrong."

(c) The British government worker who sent an E-mail to colleagues soon after the attack on the World Trade Center pointing out that "It is now a very good day to get out anything we want to bury."

(d) The celebrity who told Barbara Walters, "Scientology rocks!"

(e) The failing businessman who told a reporter, "My baggage has been that some people basically hate me."

22. How did Modesto, California, resident Ed Ikenberry explain his inclination to vote to reelect Gary Condit?

(a) "He's been good for the district."

(b) "If the press hates someone, he must be doing something right."

(c) "I thought he hit it out of the park with Connie Chung."

(d) "He's not a murderer, I don't think."

23. Three of these headlines appeared in daily newspapers. Which one appeared in the satirical weekly *The Onion*?

(a) "MOST AMERICANS FAIL TO EXERCISE ENOUGH."

(b) "SUBS NOT DESIGNED FOR CLAUSTROPHOBICS."

(c) "STRESS WIDESPREAD AFTER ATTACKS."

(d) "A SHATTERED NATION LONGS TO CARE ABOUT STUPID BULLSHIT AGAIN."

Answers:
1. (c) 2. (a) 3. (c) 4. (b) 5. (a) 6. (d) 7. (e) 8. (f) 9. (a) 10. (b) 11. (c) 12. (d) 13. (e) 14. (f) 15. (c) 16. (a) 17. (d) 18. (e) 19. (b) 20. (a) 21. (c) 22. (d) 23. (b)

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